

Poets of Hope and Despair

Russian History and Culture

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Poets of Hope and Despair

*The Russian Symbolists
in War and Revolution, 1914-1918*

Second Revised Edition

By

Ben Hellman



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“The natives of Borneo use glow-worms on sharp poles as candles. This is the fate of writers.”

DMITRII MEREZHKOVSKII, *Bylo i budet* (1915)

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Contents

Preface to the First Edition	IX
Preface to the Second Edition	X

Introduction	1
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1 Symbolism Before the War	4
The Birth of Symbolism. Two Generations	4
The Symbolists and Politics	12
2 The War: Act I (1914-1915)	26
First Reactions	26
Realities of the War	40
<i>Valerii Briusov as War Correspondent</i>	40
<i>The Theme of Life at the Front</i>	50
The Burning Questions	63
<i>The Tragedy of Occupied Belgium</i>	63
<i>The Tragedy of Divided Poland</i>	69
<i>The Tragedy of the Victimized Jews</i>	81
The Neo-Slavophiles	86
<i>Viacheslav Ivanov: The Messianic Task of Russia</i>	86
<i>Fedor Sologub: East Against West</i>	96
<i>Valerii Briusov: Slavs Against Germans</i>	106
<i>The Dream of Tsar'grad</i>	115
Patriotic Fiction	122
<i>Fedor Sologub: To Believe or to Doubt</i>	122
<i>Konstantin Bal'mont: Cursing the Satanic Dogs</i>	136
The Critics of Nationalism	143
<i>Zinaida Gippius: Accepting the War Outwardly, Rejecting It Inwardly</i>	143
<i>Dmitrii Merezhkovskii: How to Overcome the War</i>	159
The Outsiders	173
<i>Aleksandr Blok: "Back to You, Russia!"</i>	173
<i>Andrei Belyi: "I Am the War"</i>	182
Facing Adversity	191
<i>Fedor Sologub: The War as a Sacrificial Feat</i>	191

3 The War: Act II (1915-1917)	198
Defeats and Deadlock: Occasional Verse	198
Viacheslav Ivanov: Behind the German Threat – China!	204
Fedor Sologub: “Our Children Will Save Russia...”	209
Valerii Briusov: The Duty to Remember	219
Konstantin Bal'mont: Betrayed	222
Zinaida Gippius: Waiting for Revolution	226
Dmitrii Merezhkovskii: Waiting for the Apocalypse	231
Andrei Belyi: The Revolt of the Machines	237
Aleksandr Blok: Demoralization on all Sides	247
Valerii Briusov: After Thirty Months of War	253
 4 The War: Act III (1917-1918)	 258
The February Revolution of the Spirit	258
Who Is for the War? Who Is Against?	271
Russia in Deep Crisis	291
The October Revolution: The End or the Beginning?	312
 5 The Symbolist Experience 1914-1918	 337
 Bibliography	 347
Index of Names	365

The system of transliteration used in this study is the Library of Congress system without diacritical marks. Some exceptions from the general rules (i.e. geographical names) have been made to allow for more commonly accepted spellings. Dates are given according to the Julian, or Old Style calendar, but the corresponding Gregorian calendar dates are in certain cases added.

Preface to the First Edition

This work was begun under the tutorship of the late Professor Sven Linnér at Åbo Akademi. His generous support and unfailing belief in my work were of the most decisive importance. I dedicate this book to his memory. My colleague at the University of Helsinki, Associate Professor Pekka Pesonen, himself a prominent specialist on Russian symbolism, has also wholeheartedly encouraged me with much valuable advice. Concrete help has further been given by Professor Richard Stites (Georgetown University) and Dr. Efim Kurganov (Helsinki). As my work on the general topic of Russian writers and the First World War has been conducted over a long period of time, I have had the opportunity to discuss the subject with more colleagues than can be mentioned here. To all of them – unnamed but not forgotten – my sincere gratitude.

Help with the English translation has been given by several native-speakers, but the main work was proficiently done by Richard Davies (University of Leeds). I am also grateful to Paul Graves (Helsinki) who thoroughly revised the poetry translations. I myself, needless to say, bear all responsibility for the final version of the book.

Financial support for my work was provided by the University of Helsinki, the Research Institute of the Åbo Akademi Foundation, Jenny ja Antti Wihurin rahasto and Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland.

Helsinki, 8 October 1995
Ben Hellman

Preface to the Second Edition

The centennial of the First World War brought with it a renewed interest in the topic of the present volume. The Russian literary heritage of the war years was discussed at seminars and conferences and laid out and analyzed in publications. In Russia, a move away from the Soviet limited perception of the war could be seen, resulting in new, more profound perceptions of the emotional and analytical involvement of the individual writers in the event. From having been a largely forgotten war it was now seen as an integral part of Russia's tragic twentieth century.

The second edition of my *Poets of Hope and Despair* follows in all essentials the first. As fairly little new material connected specially with the Russian Symbolists at war and revolution has been published, I have mainly confined myself to correcting misprints, taking heed of reviews of the first edition of my book and adding references to new research.

Helsinki, 6 December 2017
Ben Hellman

Introduction

Fedor Sologub called one of the articles he wrote during the First World War “Why the symbolists accepted the war” (“Pochemu simvolisty priniali voinu”). According to Sologub, the Russian symbolists had welcomed the World War in 1914, not as a struggle for territorial conquests and economic influence, or as mass annihilation, but as a phenomenon which on a spiritual level was in harmony with their world view. In their works the symbolists had repeatedly expressed contempt for the modern world and forebodings of a coming cataclysm. The war represented not only the judgement of humankind, but also the threshold to a transfigured world, and therefore it had been accepted by the symbolists. To back up his claim, Sologub quoted poems by Valerii Briusov and Viacheslav Ivanov.¹ Presumably only modesty prevented him from referring to his own works. Still Sologub’s declaration was a simplification. Perhaps he realized this, as the title of the manuscript was changed to the less challenging “Faithful until the End” (“Derzanie do kontsa”) when the article was published in 1917.² In reality the reactions of the symbolists to the World War were complicated and did not even conform to the dichotomy of acceptance or rejection. Their response to the revolutions of 1917 confirmed the difficulty of speaking in the name of all the symbolists. An important chapter in the history of Russian literature was clearly drawing to a close.

Symbolism was the major literary movement in Russia in the early 20th century, gathering some of the greatest poets of the period under its banner. It is mainly these outstanding individual symbolists who have received scholarly attention, while the movement as a whole was long treated only in connection with the general history of Russian literature. Notable exceptions are Ronald Peterson’s *A History of Russian Symbolism* (1993) and Avril Pyman’s *A History of Russian Symbolism* (1994), in which, however, the period 1914–1918 is given only scant attention. In the 1910s symbolism lost its dominant role as the result of internal crises and exterior challenges, and, consequently, attempts to trace the shared features of this final period of the movement have been rare.

As a reaction against realism in literature, Russian symbolism did not conform with the aesthetic ideals that became dominant in Soviet Russia. As a

1 The manuscript of the article “Pochemu simvolisty priniali voinu” is in the archive of Fedor Sologub (Pushkinskii dom, St. Petersburg). It is quoted by Orest Tsekhovitsker, *Literatura i mirovaia voina: 1914–1918* (Moscow, 1938), pp. 196–7, who was unaware that the article appeared in print after the February revolution, but with a new title, “Derzanie do kontsa”.

2 Fedor Sologub, “Derzanie do kontsa”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 16.3.1917 16138.

result, symbolism was for a long time treated with undisguised hostility in Soviet literary criticism, an exception being made only for the “Soviet symbolists”, Blok and Briusov. “The symbolists and the 1905 revolution” was a theme of interest for Marxist-orientated critics, as the involvement of the symbolist poets in the struggle against autocracy could be presented as a victory of a revolutionary reality over a reactionary literary programme. Considerably less attention was given to the theme of the symbolists and the October revolution, and the argumentation of the Bolsheviks’ opponents was never scrutinized in detail by Soviet critics.

The question of Russian writers and the World War was a popular subject in Soviet literary research during the interwar period.³ Dogmatic critics, like Vladimir Ermilov⁴ and A. Volkov,⁵ took unconcealed delight in unmasking the symbolists’ support of the war, or “the grand slaughter”, as it was generally described, this by contrast with the anti-war stance of the “democratic realists”. In accordance with their class background, these so-called modernists, with the notable exception of Blok, were exposed as the chauvinistic lackeys of capitalism and Russian imperialism. It was axiomatic that whoever rejected Soviet power in 1917 must inevitably have been a jingoist during the World War. As a result, the émigrés Dmitrii Merezhkovskii and Zinaida Gippius received particularly unfair treatment. What was labelled as the “animal hatred” of these writers for Soviet power turned into the “animal hatred” of Soviet literary critics for them. This is most obviously the case in Orest Tsekhnovitser’s monograph of 1938, *Literature and the World War* (*Literatura i mirovaia voina*). Tsekhnovitser assembled a large body of material, including examples from English, French and German, as well as Russian literature. An attempt was made to trace the connection between pre-war and wartime literature. In many respects Tsekhnovitser’s book is a pioneering work, but its weaknesses are obvious and symptomatic of its time. Driven by outspoken ideological sympathies and antipathies, the author preferred to do violence to inconvenient evidence rather than to adjust his over-rigid scheme. Tsekhnovitser’s work formed the basis for later Soviet studies of the subject, but the experience of the Second World War

3 See, for example, [V.V. Ermilov], “O poezii voiny”, *Na literaturnom postu* 10 (1927), pp. 1-4; V.M. Saianov, “K voprosu o sud’bakh akmeizma”, *Na literaturnom postu* 17-18 (1927), pp. 1-4 and Raisa Messer, “Russkie simvolisty i imperialisticheskaia voina”, *Leningrad* 7 (1932), pp. 65-74.

4 V. Ermilov, *Za zhivogo cheloveka v literature* (Moscow, 1928).

5 A.A. Volkov, *Poeziia russkogo imperializma* (Moscow, 1935). See also A.A. Volkov, “Akmeizm i imperialisticheskaia voina”, *Znamia* 7 (1933), pp. 165-81.

modified some of its basic assumptions.⁶ Russian patriotism was no longer rejected outright, and the literary image of the German enemy was no longer considered to have been simply slanderous. However, no further attempt was made to give a comprehensive picture of the issue.

The aim of the present study is to describe and analyse the attitudes of the symbolists to the events of the period from 1914 to 1918. Detailed attention is given to the eight principal Russian symbolists, namely Konstantin Bal'mont, Andrei Belyi, Aleksandr Blok, Valerii Briusov, Zinaida Gippius, Viacheslav Ivanov, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, and Fedor Sologub. Minor symbolists, or writers who were only in brief contact with the movement, have not been included in our study, as their role during this period was insignificant. The study concentrates on the immediate reactions of the symbolists to the First World War and the revolutions of 1917, on their image of Russia and its allies and enemies, and also on their various concepts of the role of art in times of crisis. Use is made of material drawn from the fiction and literary journalism of the period, in which the issues of war and revolution are explicitly discussed. The sources also include published biographical material like interviews, diaries and letters.

It is common knowledge that the First World War did not give birth to any great literature in Russia. "War literature" was treated harshly by contemporary critics and later observers have not felt compelled to dispute their judgements. The main works of the period were not primarily concerned with the socio-political realities of the time, but even so, as Belyi later confessed, the World War totally changed "the tonality of creative writing".⁷ As the spectacular end of a historical epoch, the period 1914-1918 left its imprint upon all the writers of the time. This is especially true for the Russian symbolists, who set themselves up to be not only sensitive seismographs of their time, but also prophets of things to come.

6 See, for example, V.P. Vil'chinskii, "Literatura 1914-1917 godov", in *Sud'by russkogo realizma nachala XX veka* (Leningrad, 1972), pp. 228-76.

7 Andrei Belyi, "O sebe kak pisatele", in K.N. Bugaeva, *Vospominaniia o Belom* (Berkeley, 1981), p. 326.

Symbolism Before the War

The Birth of Symbolism. Two Generations

The roots of Russian symbolism are to be sought in the 1880's. The failure of populism and terrorism – the attempts to use enlightenment and violence to achieve political goals – had resulted in frustration. The assassination of Alexander II in 1881 was followed by a period of reaction, during which political and social reforms were postponed. The change in the atmosphere was also felt within the cultural sphere. Since the time of Vissarion Belinskii the role of Russian literature had been defined mainly in terms of its social significance. Writers felt obliged to point out social defects and to foster radical attitudes in their readers. As doubts about the prospects of socio-political change grew stronger, this utilitarian approach to literature began to be questioned. Not only were the results achieved by “civic writers” meagre, but the demand for a marked socio-political tendency had also impoverished fiction. This was felt particularly strongly in poetry, but prose had also fallen into decline after the era of the great realists.

In other countries, too, a significant shift in the outlook on life of writers and artists occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century. There was a reaction against positivism and materialism, against rationalism and scientific methods of obtaining knowledge. The impact of the German philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche was felt strongly all over Europe, including Russia. From France there came impulses for a corresponding renewal of art. A new literary movement, symbolism, gained ground in poetry, challenging prevailing aesthetic and ethical values. At its core was a wish to evoke “unseen realities” through a concentration on emotions and fantasies and a refined, subjective use of metaphors and symbols.

One of the first manifestations of a revolt against realism in Russia was Nikolai Minskii's *In the Light of Conscience* (*Pri svete sovesti*, 1890). Attacking realism and the expectations of civic commitment Minskii asserted the freedom of art to serve goals other than the social. The starting point of his search for the “mysterious origin of life” was an affirmation of the “ego”.¹ Self-indulgence is no shameful vice, Minskii declared, but an inescapable imperative, equal to

1 N.M. Minskii, *Pri svete sovesti: Mysli i mechty o tseli zhizni* (St. Petersburg, 1890), p. VII.

an acceptance of life. His was a distinctly Nietzschean ideal of a superman beyond good and evil, rejecting Christian pity as a sign of weakness. Minskii gained support from Dmitrii Merezhkovskii. In his 1892 lectures "On the reasons for the decline of and on new currents in contemporary Russian literature" ("O prichinakh upadka i o novykh techeniiaakh sovremennoi russkoi literatury") Merezhkovskii accused the literary critics of having thrown Russian literature into a state of crisis. Their demands for a "useful" and altruistic literature had led to the neglect of metaphysical questions and art's aesthetic dimension. In accordance with what was happening in contemporary European literature, Merezhkovskii anticipated the rise of an idealistic, neo-romantic literature in Russia.

Minskii and Merezhkovskii were both poets, but the first artistic achievements of Russian symbolism are not to be found in their poetry. Theory was put into practice in the mid-1890's by Valerii Briusov, Konstantin Bal'mont, Fedor Sologub and Zinaida Gippius. Poetry became the main vehicle of the new movement, even if Merezhkovskii, Sologub and Gippius proved that prose could also be put into the service of the new artistic sensibility.

Three volumes of poetry, *Russian Symbolists* (*Russkie simvolisty*, 1894-1895) gave a name and a face to the literary revolution. Behind most of the poems stood Valerii Briusov (1873-1924), a Moscow student, who at an early age had decided to become the leader of Russian symbolism. His dependence upon contemporary French poetry was obvious, but the slim booklets of *Russian Symbolists* nevertheless attracted attention, not least because of Briusov's challenging, self-confident tone. Successive volumes of poetry revealed Briusov also to be a master of form. His literary credo was formulated in the essay "The Keys to the Mysteries" ("Kliuchi tain", 1904). Poetry should treat eternal and therefore always topical themes like beauty, love, life and death. The poet was to concentrate upon his own inner life and in an impressionistic manner depict the fleeting moments of human existence. Honesty was an obligation and therefore the poet should also accept that which was irrational and generally considered immoral. Briusov's eclectic world view was defined by a developed historical consciousness and a love of the heroic and the grand. His main concern was for literature, and until the October revolution he never tired of defending its independence from political, social and religious obligations.

Another Moscow poet, Konstantin Bal'mont (1867-1942), gave proof of an impressive linguistic refinement with his first collection of poetry, *Under the Northern Sky* (*Pod severnym nebom*, 1894). Sonority and melodiousness were his outstanding features. From pure aestheticism and a resigned acceptance of the limitations of earthly existence, Bal'mont soon moved to a joyful praise of all aspects of life. In the spirit of a pantheistic belief in cosmic oneness, he

saw everywhere a striving towards a higher, only intuitively conceivable reality. In his poetry Bal'mont tried to convey subjective impressions and moods, and he characteristically often compared himself to the wind or a cloud.² With his ecstatic self-glorification, he created a poetic world where the persona is a superman, not even hesitating to strike amoral poses. By contrast with Briusov, Bal'mont relied more on spontaneous inspiration than on hard work. As a globetrotter and a skillful translator, he showed an extraordinary openness and thirst for world culture.

Some literary critics have chosen to see Briusov and Bal'mont, together with marginal figures like Iurgis Baltrushaitis, as forming a symbolist group of their own. The features they had in common were a programmatic individualism and a preoccupation with the aesthetic side of poetry. Symbolism was for them a purely literary movement, and the standard of poetry was to be raised through the cultivation of language and form. Through translations of modern European and American poetry, Briusov and Bal'mont opened up windows to the West. They also shared traits that made critics initially call the new movement "decadence". Both challenged established norms, manifestly sharing Minskii's statement from *In the Light of Conscience* that all moral values are relative. Love yourself above everything else, escape the present moment, and do not feel pity for anyone, were the postulates propounded in Briusov's poem "To a Young Poet" ("Iunomu poetu", 1896).³ As pronounced individualists they used poetry to reveal the secrets of the human soul, but lacked the other symbolists' inclination towards philosophy and religion.

The St. Petersburg symbolist Fedor Sologub (1863-1927) stood out as the arch-decadent of Russian literature. A few years before the First World War, his wife Anastasiia Chebotarevskaja summarized the image critics had created of him: "A maniac, a sadist, a morbid, maimed talent with psychopathic leanings."⁴ Eroticism, satanism and the aestheticization of death were traits that could have been added to the list. In his poems, short stories, novels and plays, written in a simple but artistic style, Sologub expressed a feeling of alienation from the physical world. Life is seen as dominated by the powers of evil and unable to be transformed through social activity. Dreams, fantasies and death offer ways out. A famous example is the first paragraph of the novel *A Legend*

2 Marc Slonim, *From Chekhov to the Revolution: Russian Literature 1900-1917* (New York, 1972), p. 95.

3 Valerii Briusov, *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, vol. I (Moscow, 1973), pp. 99-100 ("Iunomu poetu").

4 Anastasiia Chebotarevskaja, "'Tvorimoe' tvorchestvo", in *O Fedore Sologube: Kritika, stat'i i zametki* (St. Petersburg, [1911]), p. 79.

in the *Making* (*Tvorimaia legenda*, 1913-14), in which Sologub gives the artist the role of a demiurge, the all-mighty creator of an enchanted world of his own.⁵ Faithful to the poetics of early symbolism, Sologub equated change with aesthetic metamorphosis, the creation of an artistic image of the world. For the creative act he used the neologism to “dulcinate” (*dul'tsinirovat'*), referring to Don Quixote, who with the help of his imagination turned the plump peasant girl Aldonsa into the beautiful maiden Dulcinea. Sologub's metaphysical pessimism, which has been compared to Manichaeism, culminated in 1908 with the volume *Circle of Fire* (*Plamennyi krug*).

More generally accepted than the term “decadents” is the “older symbolists” or the “first wave of symbolism”, a group which apart from Briusov, Bal'mont and Sologub also includes Merezhkovskii and Gippius. The “older symbolists” started to publish in the 1890's, and their early poetry was characterized by aestheticism and a *fin de siècle* mood. Yet the difference between them was obvious and they were gradually to grow even greater. While Briusov, Bal'mont and Sologub remained foreign or even hostile to Christianity for a long time, Merezhkovskii and Gippius, two writers who had been united by marriage in 1889, actively contributed to the emergence of a new religious consciousness in Russia, overcoming personal despair and isolation by subordinating their art to the promotion of spiritual values and a Christian sociality.

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii (1865-1941) began as a poet who regarded everything visible as symbolic of an enigmatic unknown. It was in his literary essays and historical novels that his world view was most poignantly formulated. History was for him a “struggle between paganism and Christianity, between the flesh and the spirit, between knowledge and faith”, and he strove to mold these conflicting forces into a synthesis.⁶ At the turn of the century, Merezhkovskii approached the Russian Orthodox Church, but the alliance of the Church with the secular authorities and its rejection of new prophetic impulses made his interest soon turn into antipathy. Together with the “younger symbolists”, Merezhkovskii displayed an apocalyptic yearning for the Second Coming of Christ, which would establish a universal theocratic society, the Kingdom of God on earth. He viewed the individualistic emphasis of Russian symbolism with a growing hostility, as it contradicted his image of the humankind of the future as a spiritual brotherhood.

Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945) also overcame decadent leanings and the existential pessimism of her early poetry, as she began to espouse a belief in an

5 Fedor Sologub, *Tvorimaia legenda*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1991), p. 7.

6 Slonim, p. 111.

apocalyptic Christianity. Art was to be an expression of man's striving to reach spiritual and moral enlightenment, with a religious sociality as the ultimate goal. If Gippius initially contrasted the depressing routine of everyday life and the petty-bourgeois craving for comfort and peace with Dream, she later replaced this, too, with the ideal of an all-embracing love and universal unity.

Bonds of friendship and mutual admiration soon grew up between the symbolists. A literary journal, *Vesy* (1904-09), and a publishing house, *Skorpion* (1900-16), were created to promote the ideals of the movement. In St. Petersburg, Merezhkovskii participated in the foundation of the Religious-Philosophical Meetings, where writers and philosophers met representatives of the Orthodox Church to discuss spiritual questions. The journal *Novyi put'* (1903-04) and its sequel *Voprosy zhizni* (1905) became organs for the new religious consciousness, while *Zolotoe runo* (1906-09) mainly published works by the symbolists of the second wave. The names of these so-called younger symbolists – Viacheslav Ivanov, Aleksandr Blok and Andrei Belyi – could already be encountered in *Vesy* and *Novyi put'*. The term does not allude to a difference of age – only Merezhkovskii was senior to Ivanov – but to a later time of début and a slightly different outlook on the function of art. Freeing themselves from the influence of the “older symbolists”, they soon revealed original traits. Symbolism was for them broader than a literary movement; it was an approach to life and the instrument for a religious mysticism. Beneath the surge of external events they perceived a hidden transcendental actuality. If for the “older symbolists” the poet was mainly “the creator of strictly private and purely artistic values”, then for the “younger symbolists” he was a theurgist and a visionary who could penetrate to hidden truths.⁷ The target of his activity was the whole of humankind. Vague anticipations and mystical revelations helped the “younger symbolists” to cross the borders of knowledge and produce visions of the expected transfiguration of man.

An important source of inspiration for the “younger symbolists” were the works of the philosopher and metaphysical poet Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900). According to Solov'ev, the historical process was a movement towards a reunion between the world and God. The merging of the human and the divine would ultimately result in Godmanhood (*Bogochelovechestvo*). Mystical visions of the end of history made Solov'ev conclude that before the Second Coming a threat from the Antichrist in the form of Pan-Mongolism had to be defeated. From Solov'ev the “younger symbolists” also derived the concept of

7 A.L. Grigor'ev, “Simvolizm”, in *Istoriia russkoi literatury v chetyrekh tomakh*, vol. IV (Leningrad, 1983), p. 441.

Sophia, an eschatological vision of divine harmony and wisdom in the symbolic form of the Eternal Feminine.

Viacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949) has been called “the most symbolist of all the symbolists”.⁸ For him art was an expression of man’s desire to reach the divine. Through the transfiguring power of art and beauty the poet could build a bridge, firstly, between men, and, ultimately, between man and God. Ivanov searched for the supra-individual, seeing the Word as a symbol for a “universal like-mindedness”.⁹ The function of literature was to reshape life and advance humankind’s movement towards a universal collective, *obshchina*, united by the ecumenical spirit of *sobornost’*.¹⁰ Like the Slavophiles and Dostoevskii, Ivanov came to believe in the spiritual might and the historical mission of the Russian people. While calling for a nationwide and universal art, he remained the most esoteric and intellectual of all the symbolists, with a fondness for abstract and grand metaphysical concepts, an archaic vocabulary and allusions to classical myths.

Andrei Belyi (1880-1934) stressed the role of the poet as a seer and a creator of myths. Poetry was a reflection of universal truth, and human isolation was to be overcome and life transformed through contact with the Eternal. In his own life, the dynamic Belyi expressed a mystical search for the ideal. He was an important theoretician of symbolism, but his innovative force was greatest as a writer of prose. The novel *Petersburg* (*Peterburg*, 1913-14, 1916) is the outstanding achievement of symbolist prose. It brilliantly demonstrates Belyi’s acute sense of the word; in his art he applied the principles of music as far as sound and rhythm were concerned.

The greatest poet among the symbolists was Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921). His commitment to poetry and his longing for a renewed humankind and a transfigured world united him with the other symbolists. In Blok’s early poetry the symbol of Sophia merged with the image of the poet’s beloved, thus blending the divine and the worldly. Under the influence of the social clashes in contemporary Russian life Blok underwent changes, at times experiencing strong disappointment in his old ideals and beliefs, but he maintained his mystical quest and his visionary traits until his death.

The Russian symbolists displayed great differences both in their characters and in their literary profiles. Briusov was a detached observer, while Belyi em-

8 S. Averintsev, “Viacheslav Ivanov”, in Viacheslav Ivanov, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Leningrad, 1976), p. 6.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

10 B.G. Rosenthal, *D.S. Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality* (The Hague, 1975), p. 6.

bodied a heightened subjectivity and an unrestrained mobility of the mind. Bal'mont's poetry was dazzling and easily accessible, while Ivanov demanded learning and linguistic skill from his readers. Sologub detected the forces of Satan in creation, while Merezhkovskii and Gippius perceived a movement towards a theocratic society. Nevertheless, they had some important features in common. The "younger symbolists" attached as much importance to artistic method as the "old ones". Furthermore, none of them thought that art should be straightforwardly representational. When trying to "attain the unattainable", the symbolists laid stress on the role of metaphor and symbol. The landscape of the soul was to be visualized through equivalents in the external world. The symbol was also a device that enabled the artist to grasp the essence of existence, which was only dimly discernible.

The symbolists represented an anti-rational and anti-materialistic approach to reality. Instead of thinking in social categories, they wanted to move away from the visible surface into the depths of human consciousness. The poet was to render transcendental truths, only intuitively comprehended. Everything was a sign of the invisible, and art was the instrument for receiving insight and knowledge. The symbolist outlook was based on an idealist, neoplatonic philosophy. Two worlds existed, the world of ideas and the world of phenomena, and poetry was a way of achieving contact with a higher and deeper reality. Poetry was important not only as a revelation of the hidden, but it was also a force for the transformation of reality. Anticipations of great changes and an impending apocalypse were common to all the symbolists. The exclusive importance they attached to art was part of their wish to participate in the transformation of humankind.

The heyday of Russian symbolism was the first decade of the twentieth century. From having been a mere curiosity, it won general recognition within a few years. Merezhkovskii's trilogy, *Christ and Antichrist* (*Khristos i Antikhris*, 1895-1904), Briusov's *Urbi et Orbi* (1903), Bal'mont's *Let's Be Like the Sun* (*Budem kak solntse*, 1903), Blok's *Verses on the Beautiful Lady* (*Stikhi o prekrasnoi dame*, 1904) and Sologub's novel *The Petty Demon* (*Melkii bes*, 1905, 1907) were among the chief events of Russian literature during this period. Personal bonds and a feeling of exclusivity were strengthened through literary gatherings in the salon of Gippius and Merezhkovskii and in Ivanov's "tower" apartment. However, after a few years of dominance symbolism was already threatened by a crisis. In 1906 the polemic about "mystical anarchism", an ideological credo formulated by Georgii Chulkov, caused deep schisms.¹¹ This was an attempt to

11 See Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 282-4.

bridge the generation gap by unifying affirmation of the individual personality with the dream of a religious sociality. Through total freedom of the individual from all kinds of constraints and dogmas an era of “freedom, beauty and love” could be attained.¹²

In 1909 the two main organs of symbolism, *Vesy* and *Zolotoe runo*, both ceased publication. The symbolists presented this as a victory: as symbolism had by now permeated Russian culture and thought, exclusive organs had become superfluous. Nevertheless, it was obvious that there was a lack of contact with the readership. The appearance of epigones was another indication that symbolism had reached a phase of degeneration.

In 1910 a public conflict broke out between Briusov and the “younger symbolists”.¹³ Briusov protested against the attempts of the “younger” writers to equate symbolism with a religious and mystical world view. Art did not have to involve the creation of myths, and the poet was not necessarily a prophet. Briusov’s insistence on the primacy of aesthetic goals and individualism was unacceptable to Blok, Belyi and Ivanov, who all stood up for mysticism. For them symbolism had to be more than pure art: it was an attempt to access other worlds and part of a general striving towards the unification of humankind.

After 1910 – the year of crisis – symbolism did indeed seem to have lost its status as an active collective force in Russian literature. New literary movements, futurism and acmeism, openly challenged some of the main symbolist values. No new journal appeared to replace *Vesy* and *Zolotoe runo*. Personal contacts also grew more scarce, as Merezhkovskii, Gippius, Bal’mont and Belyi lived abroad for many years. Belyi distanced himself from literary life after his meeting with Rudolf Steiner in 1912. His fascination with Steiner’s “anthroposophy”, which he saw as connected with the symbolist programme, was not shared by the others.

Furthermore, in the 1910’s it seemed that the “older symbolists” had already given their best. The decline in the aesthetic standard of their works was obvious. What had been creative in Briusov’s poetry became a tradition-bound academism, as he turned from a challenging decadent into a respected, culture-conscious *maître*. Bal’mont had begun to repeat himself in an artificial and bombastic way, which made Blok dismiss his poetry as “ab-

12 Beatrice Glatzer Rosenthal and Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak (eds.), *A Revolution of the Spirit: Crisis of Value in Russia, 1890-1924* (New York, 1990), p. 175.

13 See, for example, Ronald E. Peterson, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Amsterdam, 1993), pp. 150-3.

surd nonsense".¹⁴ The artistic level of Sologub's prose fell drastically in the 1910's, and neither did Gippius enjoy any success with her attempts at writing prose. Merezhkovskii was still considered by many as "a teacher and almost a prophet" in Russia,¹⁵ and he was the only one of the symbolists to achieve European fame, but his main work, *Christ and Antichrist*, also lay behind him.

"There is no kind of symbolism anymore", Blok wrote in his diary in 1913.¹⁶ But even if the process of disintegration was an undeniable fact, Blok's statement needs modification. The discussion of 1910 can also be seen as an attempt to infuse new life into symbolism by more sharply defining its basic traits. The individual symbolists were still active in the literary field, serving ideals which were close to their initial programme, even if they did not put them forward in theoretical form any longer. The new historical challenges – war and revolution – that were appearing over the horizon also had to be confronted within the boundaries of symbolism.

The Symbolists and Politics

As a literary movement symbolism emerged as a reaction against socially orientated literature. Instead of "going to the people" like the previous generation, the symbolists preferred to look inwards in order to attain self-knowledge or knowledge of the universe. Where the realists had dealt with contemporary issues and suggested ways of improving society, the symbolists chose, as Briusov put it, "to look at everything from the perspective of eternity".¹⁷ Merezhkovskii talked with contempt about "the dead talk of dead people about the economic well-being of the people".¹⁸ In order to escape the demands of a "utilitarian art" the symbolists made a point of not having a fixed ideology. A pronounced anti-dogmatism and anti-rationalism were especially characteristic for Briusov and Bal'mont, the former defining art as "cognition of the world beyond rational forms, beyond thinking about causality".¹⁹ There was no such thing as a single,

14 Aleksandr Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. v (Moscow-Leningrad, 1962), p. 374.

15 A. Izmailov, *Pestrye znamena: Literaturnye portrety bezvremen'ia* (Moscow, 1913), p. 125.

16 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 216.

17 Aleksandr Il'inskii, "Gor'kii i Briusov: Iz istorii lichnykh otnoshenii", in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 27-28 (Moscow, 1937), p. 642 (letter to Gor'kii, Feb. 1901).

18 D.S. Merezhkovskii, *O prichinakh upadka i o novykh techeniakh sovremennoi russkoi literatury* (St. Petersburg, 1893), p. 62.

19 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VI, p. 91 ("Kliuchi tain").

final truth. "To me all dreams are sweet, to me all speeches dear,/ and to all the gods I dedicate my verse..." ("Mne sladki vse mechty, mne dorogi vse rechi,/ I vsem bogam ia posviashchaiu stikh..."), Briusov stated in the poem "I" ("Ia", 1899).²⁰ Vladislav Khodasevich remembers a similar utterance made in 1904: "It is highly possible that there is not one, but several, perhaps eight true answers to every question. When we assert *one* truth, we are recklessly ignoring the other seven."²¹ That this allegiance to pluralism, or, seen from another angle, this lack of rigid principles, did not only concern questions of aesthetics, Briusov was to demonstrate repeatedly throughout his career. When he was accused of opportunism after the October revolution, he answered by claiming the right to inconsistency as part of his literary method: "Only a poet-pedant is able to avoid contradictions, only he who does not 'create', but 'makes' his poems will always be true to one and the same views in them."²²

In French symbolism the feeling of end, *fin de siècle*, was strong. In Russia it was substituted by an optimistic "dawn mentality" around the turn of century. It could be found in Bal'mont's collection of poetry *Buildings on Fire* (*Goriashchie zdaniia*, 1900), but it was especially intense in the poetry of the "younger symbolists". Theirs was an attempt to decipher what Belyi called "the apocalyptic rhythm of time". A radical shift in history would, in their view, create a new heaven and a new earth and transfigure man. Their yearning for religious revelations and a revolution of the spirit was partly inspired by their reading, especially of Vladimir Solov'ev. It was in the light of such expectations that the symbolists later were to interpret political events, merging the notion of an impending Apocalypse with war and revolution.

Expectations of a completely different kind were harbored by Briusov. When the symbolists obtained their own organ, *Novyi put'*, in 1903, he reserved for himself not only the role of poet and literary critic, but also that of political commentator. His first article already revealed his interest in great-power politics and, on a greater scale, the fate of civilizations. The thesis he put forward was that while the 19th century had been the era of nationalism, the 20th century would be the era of imperialism and big empires. Briusov did not confine himself to the role of an impartial observer, but longed to see his theory confirmed. The great powers should start dividing the world between themselves, while the small nations had to submit to "the universal, historical task of imperialism".²³ One of the great empires of history was Russia, to

20 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 1, p. 142 ("Ia").

21 V.F. Khodasevich, *Nekropol': Vospominaniia* (Paris, 1976), p. 31.

22 V. Briusov, "Miscellanea", *Moskva* 5 (1920), p. 9.

23 Val[erii] Br[iusov], "V etu minutu istorii", *Novyi put'* 1 (1903), p. 166.

which Briusov attributed a special mission. It was not a mission of a spiritual or religious kind, as the Slavophiles had proposed, but simply a duty to exert power and expand one's influence. Briusov could call Russia the "Third Rome" ("Tsusima", 1905),²⁴ but this was clearly just a historical reflex, as the notion of Russia as the preserver of true Christianity was irrelevant to the irreligious Briusov. In what he called his "geographical patriotism",²⁵ power and spatial vastness were of greater importance than religion and culture. Briusov's advice to the Russian authorities was to accept the status of a great power and forcefully fulfill the national call.²⁶

In 1904 war against Japan broke out in Manchuria. It was an imperialistic, distant war that failed to elicit widespread enthusiasm. The symbolists did not actively join the struggle, but preferred to follow events from afar. No common symbolist view of the Russo-Japanese war emerged, but as a rehearsal for the First World War it revealed much of what was in store. Briusov greeted the outbreak of war with pleasure. He was convinced that Russia's national call lay precisely in the Far East, where up till now, much to his regret, Russia had shown a misplaced "correctness" through a cautious policy of concessions.²⁷ On the first day of the war Briusov wrote the poem "To the Pacific Ocean" ("K Tikhomu okeanu"), encouraging the Russian army in its thrust eastwards. Russian war aims were in keeping with the spirit of the century, as Briusov had defined it, and no moral objections should prevent them from being fulfilled.²⁸ In a private letter he commented on the situation: "It is high time for us to bombard Tokyo... I love Japanese art. Since childhood I have dreamed of seeing these most fantastical Japanese temples, museums (...). But may Russian shells

24 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. I, pp. 426-7 ("Tsusima").

25 Valerii Briusov v avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh, pis'makh, vospominaniakh sovremennikov i otzyvakh kritiki (Moscow, 1929), p. 197 (letter to G.I. Chulkov, Aug. 1905).

26 Two years later, in 1905, Briusov refuted the contents and the opinions of his political chronicles, claiming that they were inspired and partly rewritten by people at the editorial board of *Vesy* (*Literaturnoe nasledstvo: Valerii Briusov*, vol. 85 /Moscow, 1976/, p. 679 /letter to S.A. Vengerov, 6 Sept. 1905/). This claim, found in a private letter, corresponds neither to the image of Briusov as a highly self-confident person nor to the fact that similar opinions were expressed in other connections as well. Typical were Briusov's own reactions when political issues appeared in his poetry: these occasions were usually followed by fits of remorse and promises to stay true to the intrinsic goals of art in the future. Here is an explanation of why Briusov so often overstepped the borders of his aesthetic program: at the crucial moments when world history was created and the passage of power occurred, he found it next to impossible to stay aloof.

27 Briusov, "V etu minutu istorii", p. 168.

28 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. I, p. 423 ("K Tikhomu Okeanu").

smash these temples and museums to pieces, and the artists themselves as well, if they still are alive. May the whole of Japan be turned into a dead Hellas, into the ruins of a better and great past, but I am for the barbarians, I am for the Huns, I am for the Russians!"²⁹

Outbursts like this, with their unabashed thirst for destruction, made the literary critic Konstantin Mochul'skii turn his attention to Briusov's psyche:

The real spirit of Briusov is to be sought in end, destruction, downfall, annihilation. He was "the most cultivated of the Russian writers", a convinced bard of civilization, a humanist in the broadest sense of the word, but in the dark depths of his soul a primordial Russian *nihilism* was lurking. He loved order, proportion and form, but was instinctively drawn to chaos; in the European Briusov there lurked an ancient hun.³⁰

Briusov's striking passion for destruction partly united him with the other symbolists. Changes were to occur through cultural dissolution, uprisings, revolutions and wars, and it was in the midst of ruins that the new life was to germinate. The fate of the individual was of slight concern when the future was being shaped. No pity was to be felt even for their own social class, or European civilization in general. When considering world politics, Briusov was attracted by the pose of a witness, something of the mood that the poet Fedor Tiutchev had captured in a famous stanza, written during the Crimean War: "Happy he who has visited this world/ in its fateful moments./ The all-blessed ones called on him/ to be their company at the feast./ He is a spectator of their sublime pageants..." ("Schastliv, kto posetil sei mir/ V ego minuty rokovye!/ Ego prizvali vseblagie/ Kak sobesednika na pir./ On ikh vysokikh zrelishch zritel").³¹ Briusov was to choose these lines both in 1906 (*Stephanos*) and in 1916 (*Sem' tsvetov radugi*) as the motto for his poems on topical subjects, thus stressing that history was not just a collection of facts about the past, but also something that was being created here and now. "A sharp feeling of participation in the present historical moment, side-glances at history, the spirit of history, evaluation of the present – life, political events and culture – from the perspective of world history, became an integral part of Briusov's thinking both as a man and a poet", writes the Russian authority on symbolism, Dmitrii Maksimov.³²

29 Valerii Briusov v avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh, pp. 196-7 (letter to P.P. Pertsov, 19 Mar. 1904).

30 K. Mochul'skii, Valerii Briusov (Paris, 1962), p. 118.

31 F.I. Tiutchev, *Polnoe sobranie stikhtovorenii* (Leningrad, 1987), p. 105 ("Tsitseron").

32 D. Maksimov, *Briusov: Poeziia i pozitsiia* (Leningrad, 1969), p. 166.

Bal'mont found it a matter of greater urgency to define a personal attitude not only to the present war, but to war in general. In the poem "Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis" he adopted a pacifist position, calling war and hatred blindness,³³ and in two other poems, "War" ("Voina") and "War Is Not Hostility" ("Voina ne vrazhda") from *Liturgy of Beauty* (*Liturgiia krasoty*, 1905), he declared that he lived in a different dimension from the belligerent nations, filled as he was with benevolence towards all men. Paradoxically, Bal'mont's complete alienation from war led to its acceptance: "Hostility is so alien to me/ that, if I were a soldier in the fight,/ then I would calmly shoot." ("Nastol'ko chuzhda mne vrazhda,/ Chto, esli b v srazhenii byl ia soldatom,/ Spokoino b streliial ia togda.") ("Voina ne vrazhda")³⁴ Living in a world of "dreams and wonders" and acknowledging only the richness of the present moment, Bal'mont refused to bow to any restricting, conventional moral norms.

A quite different attitude, more in the humane spirit of the Russian realists, was displayed by Sologub. His morbid world view had not prevented him, ever since his début, from sporadically confessing a love for Russia, its nature and its inscrutable fate. The Russo-Japanese war called forth civic poems in which Sologub saw the war as the "suffering of the people, innumerable victims, the tears of mothers".³⁵

The symbolists published most of their comments on the Russo-Japanese war in *Novyi put'*. It was also there that the most consistently religious interpretation of the war was to be found. The poet and literary critic Aleksandr Smirnov presented the war as a struggle between two opposing principles. Facing each other were "the most religious of all religious people and the most godless of all atheistic people".³⁶ Russia's sacred task was to execute judgement over a people without religion and ethics, as only a catastrophe could spiritually awaken Japan. Despite its complete failure, this view was revived in 1914, with Germany substituted for Japan, but already in 1904 echoes of this attitude were to be found, for example, in Ivanov, who rejoiced at the thought

33 K. Bal'mont, *Liturgiia krasoty: Stikhiinye gimny* (Moscow, 1905), p. 128 ("Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis").

34 *Ibid.*, p. 121 ("Voina ne vrazhda"). Bal'mont's early "war poems", "Krik chasovogo" (1900), "Voina" (1905) and "Voina ne vrazhda" (1905) were republished during the First World War, which made Orest Tsekhnovitsker (pp. 104, 276), for example, erroneously believe them to be newly written poems.

35 M.I. Dikman, "Poeticheskoe tvorchestvo Fedora Sologuba", in Fedor Sologub, *Stikhotvoreniia* (Leningrad, 1978), p. 32.

36 A. Smirnov, "O voine", *Novyi put'* 2 (1904), p. 264.

that the war could signify the start of a new spiritual era as it would force Russia to make its choice between the “cross” and the “serpent”.³⁷ Merezhkovskii also accepted the idea of national spiritual conflicts,³⁸ while Blok combined the thought of war as an arouser of the Russian people with presentiments of rebellion.³⁹ Briusov’s chauvinism, Sologub’s patriotism, Bal’mont’s individualism, and Ivanov’s and Merezhkovskii’s religious approach were also at the root of their reactions in 1914. To this can be added Zinaida Gippius’ picture of war as madness given in her short story “No Return” (“Net vozvrata”, 1906).

The defeat of the Russian army and fleet and the ensuing harsh peace were traumatic experiences. For Briusov they not only meant that Russian plans in the Far East had to be buried for the moment, but also that Russia had failed to live up to the stature of a great power (“Tsusima”).⁴⁰ Bal’mont blamed the Russian tsar for the defeat (“Nash tsar”),⁴¹ while refraining from launching a protest against the war as such. Ivanov also saw the military catastrophe as revenge on the Russian authorities, who had not spared their country, but had made an alliance with Death (“Steny Kainovy”, 1906).⁴² The war was a baptism of fire, which forced Russia to turn its gaze upwards, away from its present deceitful leaders, in search of heavenly guidance (“Tsusima”, 1905).⁴³

“Bloody Sunday”, the massacre of a peaceful demonstration in January 1905, marked the beginning of the 1905 revolution. It was impossible to remain absorbed by one’s own emotional life under the prevailing conditions, and for a short time workers, revolutionaries and writers, realists as well as symbolists, joined forces against the autocracy. Of the symbolists Nikolai Minskii went furthest, by joining the Social Democratic Party and editing the first legal Bolshevik newspaper. His poem “The Workers’ Anthem” (“Gimn rabochikh”) begins with a quotation from the Internationale: “Workers of the World, Unite!” Merezhkovskii and Gippius composed a letter of protest against the brutal suppression of popular discontent, while others helped to build barricades, participated in street demonstrations and collected money for striking workers. Their former alienation from the civic theme disappeared, as both “older” and “younger” symbolists published political verse in socialist newspapers

37 I.V. Koretskaia, “Tsikl stikhotvorenii Viacheslava Ivanova ‘Godina gneva’”, in *Revoliutsiia 1905-1907 godov i literatura* (Moscow, 1978), p. 121.

38 D.S. Merezhkovskii, *Griadushchii kham* (St. Petersburg, 1906), pp. 147-62 (“Sv. Sofia”).

39 Avriil Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 156 ff.

40 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 1, p. 427 (“Tsusima”).

41 K. Bal’mont, *Pesni mstitelia* (Paris, 1907), p. 9 (“Nash tsar”).

42 Ivanov, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, p. 166 (“Steny Kainovy”).

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 155-6 (“Tsusima”).

and satirical journals. The journal *Voprosy zhizni* also turned politically radical.

For Bal'mont the situation was not completely new. He had revolutionary credentials from his school and university years,⁴⁴ and he was the only one of the symbolists not to have denied fully the civic task of poetry.⁴⁵ Still Bal'mont had, as he confessed in "The Poet to the Worker" ("Poet rabochemu", 1905), been more preoccupied with himself than with socio-political questions. Inspired by the moment, he now announced a change of attitude: "Before me a wave of the sea;/ O, Worker, I am with you:/ I sing of your storm!" ("Predomnoiu val morskoi,/ O, Rabochii, ia s toboi,/ Buriu ia tvoiu poiui!").⁴⁶ It was no longer the "sweet-voiced bard of love and nature", but a political satirist that the reading public saw in the years 1905-1907.⁴⁷ Whereas the earlier Bal'mont had favored allusiveness and ambiguity, he now employed strong invective and displayed outspoken sympathies. The search for originality was abandoned, as Bal'mont filled his lexicon with hackneyed revolutionary symbols and phrases. Russia, "the rotten autocracy",⁴⁸ was compared to a prison where violence and oppression reigned. Bal'mont showed a conspicuous hatred towards the tsar, "the dirty scoundrel with blood-stained hands" ("griaznyi negodiai s krovavymi rukami"),⁴⁹ whom he wanted to see mount the scaffold.⁵⁰ The goal of the revolution was "freedom", and Bal'mont appeared to regard all socialists as his allies in the struggle. Sologub likewise rejoiced at the awakening of Russia and praised the rebellion in the name of freedom and brotherhood. In his new volume of poetry, *To My Native Country* (*Rodine*, 1906), decadence and individualism were exchanged for revolutionary and patriotic themes.

Briusov wrote several topical poems, in which he expressed awestruck rapture with the revolutionary forces.⁵¹ The historical poem "Julius Caesar" ("Iulii Tsezar", 1905) is revealing, with its defense of revolt against a weak and compromised power structure. The Russian revolution was just punishment for a

44 Grigor'ev, p. 469.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 465. See, for example, the political poem "Malen'kii sultan", 1901, where the tyrant who refuses to listen to the voice of the people is threatened with "the dagger". Bal'mont found inspiration for the poem in the violent dispersal of a student demonstration that he witnessed in 1901 (Konstantin Bal'mont, *Izbrannoe: Stikhotvoreniia. Perevody. Stat'i* /Moscow, 1980/, pp. 443, 671).

46 Bal'mont, *Pesni mstitelia*, p. 41 ("Poet rabochemu").

47 Lev Ozerov, "Konstantin Bal'mont i ego poeziia", in Bal'mont, *Izbrannoe* (1980), p. 13.

48 Bal'mont, *Pesni mstitelia*, p. 14 ("Zver' spushchen").

49 *Ibid.*, p. 24 ("Nikolaiu Poslednemu").

50 *Ibid.*, p. 9 ("Nash tsar").

51 Grigor'ev, p. 469.

regime, which had failed to defend the dignity of the empire, an aspect even more important than unsolved social issues and demands for popular representation. Briusov defined his poetry as a “drawn dagger” in the hands of the people (“Kinzhai”, 1904). Yet the surrender was not total. In the midst of the revolution he instinctively rose in defence of poetry against non-literary expectations. When Ivanov asked for space for political comments in the journal *Vesy* in 1905, it was Briusov who spoke up for the autonomy of art.⁵² Likewise he defended freedom of opinion against Lenin’s demands for a literature loyal to the interests of the party.⁵³ In the poem “To My Intimates” (“Blizkim”, 1905), a curious manifesto of disloyalty, he rejected all demands of allegiance from the socialists. When “elemental forces” had been let loose and the old world was being destroyed, the poet was with the revolutionaries, but when victory had been achieved, he asked to be left alone with his visions: “I see a new battle in the name of a new freedom!/ Destroy – and I am with you; build – and I am not!” (“Ia vizhu novyi boi vo imia novoi voli!/ Lomat’ – ia budu s vami, stroit’ – net!”).⁵⁴ In 1905 Briusov accepted literature as a demolishing force and an instrument for apocalyptic visions, but he refused to put it at the service of social construction, something which had too strong a ring of the “civic poetry” that the symbolists had originally rebelled against.

In opposition to Bal’mont, Sologub and Briusov, Merezhkovskii and Gippius, together with the “younger symbolists”, interpreted the 1905 revolution in the light of an idealistic world view. It was the religious significance of the events that interested Merezhkovskii and Gippius. As a religious consciousness awoke in its participants, the character of the revolution would change.⁵⁵ Merezhkovskii saw signs of a religious sociality in the meeting between intellectuals and the people and in the universal goals of the Social Democrats.⁵⁶ Revolution was the first step towards an anarchy that only recognized the power of God, and therefore a constitution was of less value, as it did not abolish state power.

52 Koretskaia, p. 121.

53 Briusov’s article “Svoboda slova” was published in 1905 as a direct comment on Lenin’s “Partiinaiia organizatsiia i partiinaiia literatura”. Because of Briusov’s fervent defense of freedom of opinion and expression and his impudence in opposing Lenin, the article could not be republished even in Briusov’s collected works during the Soviet period.

54 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 289 (“Blizkim”).

55 Temira Pachmuss, *Zinaida Hippus: An Intellectual Profile* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois, 1971), p. 173.

56 Grigor’ev, p. 427.

Spiritual anarchism was combined with a maximalist ideal of freedom, when Ivanov tried to define the significance of the revolution for the Christian path of Russia. It was a moral purgatory and the precursor of even greater events.⁵⁷ Against the liberalism and parliamentarism he loathed, the “pseudo-freedom” of the West, Ivanov held up his metaphysical expectations and an image of the Russians as true carriers of the Christian ideals of brotherhood and freedom.⁵⁸ Some of Ivanov’s topical poems express an outspoken rejection of autocracy,⁵⁹ while others, without containing any clear-cut political statements remained metaphorical and enigmatic.

Belyi was alien to politics, but still chose to call himself a radical socialist.⁶⁰ With his revolutionary mind he thirsted for a maximal revolt and a maximal renewal, and his reaction to the events was an ardent belief in the coming of new times and a new Russia.⁶¹ He viewed the alliance of the mystics and the socialists as natural, as both were led by a wish to liberate Russia from antiquated political forms and to create an ideal life.⁶² Blok called himself a Social Democrat and wrote some “revolutionary poems,”⁶³ but still sensed that the revolutionaries belonged to a different type of men than he. In the clash of two worlds he represented the “repentant nobleman,”⁶⁴ who was aware of social injustice and accepted the revolution as a destructive elemental force that would destroy his world.⁶⁵

The Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 revolution had a profound influence on the development of the symbolist movement, as they brought the symbolists closer to the current political life of Russia. They also inspired a symbolist “civic poetry”, in which political and social questions were linked to the symbolists’ artistic program and “life-building” aspirations. The defeat of the revolution was a bitter experience, whether it had been seen as a struggle for freedom, or as the harbinger of a universal Apocalypse. Ivanov compared Russia to a Golgotha, covered with crosses. Hurling invectives at tsarism, he conjured

57 Averintsev, p. 44.

58 Koretskaia, p. 120.

59 Averintsev, p. 9.

60 A.V. Lavrov, “Andrei Belyi”, in *Istoriia russkoi literatury v chetyrekh tomakh*, vol. IV, pp. 557-8.

61 See, for example, Andrei Belyi, “Lug zelenyi”, *Vesy* 8 (1905), pp. 5-16.

62 Lavrov, p. 558.

63 See, for example, “Shli na pristup. Priamo v grud’...”, “Miting”, “Sytye”, “Pozhar”, “Visia nad gorodom vsemirnym...” and “Eshche prekrasno seroe nebo...”.

64 Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. I, p. 191.

65 Z.G. Mints, “Aleksandr Blok”, in *Istoriia russkoi literatury v chetyrekh tomakh*, vol. IV, p. 526.

up threatening visions of how despotism would be overthrown by those with “enlightened hearts”.⁶⁶ He was joined by Bal’mont, who scolded “the hangmen of the revolution” and all those who had surrendered too easily. The settling of accounts with the revolutionaries also shattered the symbolist camp. Minskii was arrested and accused of subversive activity, but managed to flee to France. He was soon followed by Bal’mont, Merezhkovskii and Gippius. In Paris the symbolist émigrés published radical accounts of the defeated liberation movement. Merezhkovskii and Gippius’ book *Le Tsar et la Révolution* (Paris, 1907) and Bal’mont’s collection of revolutionary poems, *Songs of the Avenger* (*Pesni mstitelia*, Paris 1907), “a monument to his civic courage”,⁶⁷ were banned in Russia. *Poems* (*Stikhotvoreniia*, 1906), a volume of poetry that Bal’mont published in Russia in 21,000 copies, was immediately confiscated. Sologub also tested the limits of political censorship, experiencing great difficulties with his *Little Political Fairy Tales* (*Politicheskie skazochki*, 1906) and their ambiguous satires on autocracy. Merezhkovskii and Gippius were able to return to Russia in 1908, while Bal’mont had to wait until 1913 and the amnesty declared on the occasion of the tercentenary of the Romanovs.

The period of reaction after the suppression of the 1905 revolution initially strengthened pessimistic attitudes and weakened the will to political and social commitment. Bal’mont urged his countrymen to continue the struggle and avenge their defeat, but he himself almost completely abandoned the civic theme after *Songs of the Avenger*. Blok adopted an ironical attitude to his former views, mocking his earlier mystical hopes. In Sologub’s novels *The Petty Demon* and *A Legend in the Making* there were, to be sure, pages which contained sharp criticism of the stagnant life in the Russian provinces, but it was in these post-revolutionary years that his poetry reached a nadir of depression.⁶⁸

Briusov returned to “pure” poetry, collecting his few political poems under the heading “Contemporaneity” (“Sovremennost”) in his next volumes of poetry. A poem like “Our Demon” (“Nash demon”, 1908) confirms that it was not so much the defeat of the revolutionary movement as the lost grandeur of the Russian Empire that tormented him.⁶⁹ His dreams of a politically influential and militarily active Russia had not died, but Briusov was clearly unsure about where Russia’s sphere of interest now lay. At the beginning of the century he

66 Koretskaia, p. 116.

67 Vladimir Markov, “Balmont: A Reappraisal”, *Slavic Review* 28 (1969), no. 2, p. 239.

68 Evelyn Bristol, *A History of Russian Poetry* (New York, 1991), p. 180.

69 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 1, p. 536 (“Nash demon”).

had warned of the German danger, but in 1911 it was Asia ("Prosnuvshiia Vostok")⁷⁰ and two years later the Islamic world that he saw as Russia's and Europe's main enemies.⁷¹

The fear of Pan-Mongolism, or the "Yellow Peril", the concept taken over from Solov'ev, had not disappeared from the scene, as the Russo-Japanese war seemed to testify to the reality of a threat from the East. It could be presented in symbolic terms, as when Merezhkovskii interpreted Pan-Mongolism as a "world of mediocrity and of the absolute petite bourgeoisie".⁷² In the Orient there existed a religion without God, a man-made religion of positivism, and the spiritual victory of the East would be equal to a denial of the metaphysical world. Revolutionary unrest in China in 1911 brought the issue to prominence again in the creative mind of the symbolists. Blok dreaded a possible "Mongol" attack on Western civilization, even if he interpreted it as a God-sent punishment. In Belyi's novel *Petersburg*, "Mongolism" is equal to nihilism and chaos, the elemental forces that threatened Russia and Aryan culture with dissolution.⁷³

A way out of isolation and disillusionment was offered by the loose concept of neo-populism. The theme of Russia manifested itself in an interest for the national tradition and the religious spirit of the people. In his new poetry Bal'mont ventured into Slavonic folklore and mythology. Here the true soul of Russia was to be found, while the Russian state represented lies and oppression. The theme of the intelligentsia and the people – the gulf between them and the need for reconciliation – became prominent in Blok's thinking. The people represented a revolutionary force, whereas the culture of the educated classes had lost its vitality. The double sensation of inevitable doom and revolutionary expectations found poignant expression in his "On the Field of Kulikovo" ("Na pole Kulikovom", 1908). Viacheslav Ivanov also talked about the necessity of a return by the intelligentsia to native elements, the national soul.

The emergence of a new messianic tendency was also conspicuous. Blok's view of Russia was ambivalent, but chaotic and violent as it may have been, it still remained a chosen nation, while European civilization with its individualistic culture was a dead world.⁷⁴ Belyi also considered Europe to have

70 Valerii Briusov, *Zerkalo tenei: Stikhi 1909-1912 g.* (Moscow, 1912), p. 179 ("Prosnuvshiia Vostok").

71 Valerii Briusov, "Novaia epokha vo vsemirnoi istorii: Po povodu balkanskoi voiny", *Russkaia mysl'* 6 (1913), part II, p. 98.

72 Harold C. Bedford, *The Seeker: D.S. Merezhkovskii* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1975), p. 125.

73 Vl. Orlov, "Istoriia odnoi 'druzhby-vrazhdy'", in *Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi: Perepiska. Gosudarstvennyi literaturnyi muzei. Letopisi*, vol. VII (Moscow, 1940), p. LI.

74 Mints, p. 535.

grown decrepit and looked for a new force in Russia. He did not idealize Russia, but was well aware of social injustice and class distinctions and the need for spiritual and moral purification. The path towards renewal and the birth of “the new human being” was blocked by the autocracy and prevailing social conditions, and these had therefore to be changed through new revolutions.⁷⁵ Belyi later began to see the Russian dilemma as part of a general crisis of humankind. The consciousness of modern man was split between intellect and feeling, individuality and sociality, science and religion, and a unifying force was needed.⁷⁶

As the wounds of the revolution were healed, the notion of Apocalypse and the dream of a universal religious sociality slowly revived. The thought that mankind was collectively progressing towards unification on earth and consonance with the divine was alive in Ivanov, Merezhkovskii and Gippius. In spite of the gloomy present, Ivanov's thinking was permeated with a metaphysical optimism, a belief in future universal changes.⁷⁷ Gippius intensified her work for the spread of a religious consciousness, stressing that only religion could fill the void left after the revolution.⁷⁸ A turn from pessimism to a new “dawn mentality” can be seen in Belyi's works after 1909.⁷⁹

The symbolists' expectations were not only of a metaphysical character. Briusov planned the basis of his new volume of poetry, *The Seven Colours of the Rainbow* (*Sem' tsetov radugi*, 1915) to be “a voice of affirmation”.⁸⁰ His wish was to praise the fullness of earthly life. However, the most surprising change of moods was demonstrated by Sologub. In 1912 Maksim Gor'kii had publicly scolded him for combining with a writer like Leonid Andreev in fanning an atmosphere of pessimism in Russian society.⁸¹ But the established image of Sologub as a “poet of death” would soon turn out to be completely false. In a short story of 1910 he had already made a first attempt at creating a positive hero.⁸² The aim of *The Enchantments of the Earth* (*Ocharovaniia zemli*, 1913), a volume of poetry, was to praise earthly life, while the play *Hostages of Life* (*Zalozhniki zhizni*, 1912) and the novel trilogy *A Legend in the Making* were full

75 Belyi, “O sebe kak pisatele”, p. 326; Slonim, p. 192.

76 See, for example, “Krizis soznaniia i Genrik Ibsen” (1910), in Andrei Belyi, *Arabeski: Kniga statei* (Moscow, 1911), pp. 161–210.

77 Koretskaia, p. 122.

78 Grigor'ev, p. 429.

79 Lavrov, pp. 561–2.

80 Valerii Briusov, *Sem' tsetov radugi: Stikhi 1912–1915 goda* (Moscow, 1916), p. [1v].

81 M. Gor'kii, *Stat'i 1905–1916 gg.* (Petrograd, [1917]), pp. 154–7 (“Izdaleka”, 1912).

82 Andreas Leitner, *Die Erzählungen Fedor Sologubs* (Münich, 1976), p. 122.

not only of a wish to see “a happy and rational world” take shape, but also of a belief that it was in the power of man to bring about such a change.⁸³

It was also Sologub who most pointedly formulated the need for a reformulation of the symbolist credo. In early 1914 a public debate about the state of symbolism was arranged, with Sologub, Ivanov and Georgii Chulkov as invited speakers. In spite of its crises and divisions, Sologub defended symbolism as the leading literary movement of the time. Out of what he called individualistic (Briusov, Bal'mont) and cosmic symbolism (Merezhkovskii, Gippius, Ivanov, Blok, Belyi) he wanted to form a synthesis, “democratic symbolism”, which would aim at reshaping and perfecting life.⁸⁴ The task of the artist, as formulated in a later article, “Contemporary Art” (“Iskusstvo nashikh dnei”, 1915), was to ascertain the hidden goals of development and formulate in artistic language that “what does not exist, but which has to come into existence”.⁸⁵ As the symbolists had always looked for the world of essences behind the world of phenomena and had tried to render their insights through comprehensive symbols, they had the best chance of fulfilling this task.

Sologub's belief in the power of art and the creative imagination knew no boundaries. Art was not the mirror of life, but life imitated art, Sologub quoted Oscar Wilde. People were puppets in the hands of writers, as their consciousness and thoughts were formed by fictional heroes. If a strong will existed behind a work of art, then a transference would occur, not through persuasion, but through the magic of art.⁸⁶ The artist influenced his audience, and the audience in its turn changed reality. As reality, according to the idealistic view held by Sologub, was determined by human consciousness, the main thing was not what existed, but the direction and strength of human vision and will power: “You only have to want something very strongly, merge your will with the world will in order that what you wish will come true.”⁸⁷ For the earlier Sologub the transformation of life had been individual and its instruments dream and artistic fantasy, but now he asked for an art which was an active and democratic force, brimming with love for life and striving towards *sobornost'*.⁸⁸

The other symbolists did not comment on Sologub's theses, but his longing for a transformation of society and the transfiguration of humankind through

83 Fedor Sologub, *Zalozhniki zhizni: Drama v piati deistviiakh* ([St. Petersburg], [1912]), p. 77.

84 Fedor Sologub, “Simvolisty o simvolizme: Fedor Sologub”, *Zavety* 2 (1914), part II, pp. 75-7.

85 Fedor Sologub, “Iskusstvo nashikh dnei”, *Russkaia mysl'* 12 (1915), part II, p. 51.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

88 Sologub, “Simvolisty o simvolizme”, p. 77.

a universal art were in harmony with the prevailing mood within the symbolist camp. Sologub had no time to specify the ideals and goals that were in harmony with the "World Will" before the World War broke out, but, as it turned out, the war did not shatter the abstractions of the symbolists, but on the contrary provided a reviving impetus. The last act of Russian symbolism could begin.

The War: Act I (1914-1915)

First Reactions

The summer of 1914 was hot in Russia. Those who could afford it had left the big cities to seek rest and recreation in the countryside or by the sea. Among the Russian symbolists peace and quiet prevailed. Valerii Briusov had rented a summer cottage in the village Opalikha, not far from Moscow,¹ while Viacheslav Ivanov had gone to Petrovskoe on the river Oka in the Kostroma district.² Dmitrii Merezhkovskii and Zinaida Gippius had fled the heat wave to Siverskaia, a small village close to St. Petersburg;³ Aleksandr Blok as usual was spending the summer at his family estate Shakhmatovo in the Klin district; and Fedor Sologub had for the second summer chosen Toila on the Estonian coast as his place of residence. Konstantin Bal'mont and Andrei Belyi were abroad. The former was planning to come to Russia on a lecturing tour, but for the summer he had left Paris for the coastal town of Soulac-sur-Mer.⁴ Belyi was in Switzerland, working together with other devotees of the philosopher Rudolf Steiner on the construction of an anthroposophical temple in the village of Dornach close to Basel.⁵

There were few external signs of an approaching war. While Russia's relations with the other European Great Powers seemed stable, a more serious problem was presented by social unrest within the country. A new revolutionary situation threatened to emerge from the strikes and street fighting that had broken out in Petrograd. This time the left-wing parties were not involved, and the Russian intelligentsia, which during the period of reaction had partly alienated itself from social and political questions, had also been taken by surprise. In retrospect the oppressive heat and the smell of smoke from forest fires stood out as more menacing omens of an impending cataclysm than economic rivalry between the Great Powers of Europe or conflicts of interest in

1 Ionna Briusova, "Materialy k biografii Valerii Briusova", in Valerii Briusov, *Izbrannnye stikhi* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1933), p. 138.

2 Lidia Ivanova, *Vospominaniia: Kniga ob otse* (Moscow, 1992), p. 56.

3 Zinaida Gippius, *Zhivye litsa: Vol. I[-II]. Stikhi. Dnevnik* (Tbilisi, 1991), p. 345.

4 "U K.D. Bal'monta", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 28.5.1915 14869.

5 Andrei Belyi, *Mezhdru dvukh revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1990), p. 446.

the Balkans.⁶ In her diary Gippius recalled the “pungent haze” that all through the summer lay over the country and which towards the autumn turned pinkish and even more frightening.⁷ Belyi, readily looking for mystical, external signs which would reveal the inner processes of life, noted that in Switzerland, too, a sultry heat and a rosy sky foreboded war.⁸

The symbolists loved to claim to be able to see deeper into existence than others. Intuition and premonitions were raised above precise knowledge and rational analysis. Even if none of them had given any concrete warnings of a possible war, afterwards it felt natural to refer to the mood of anxiety and sense of doom that had prevailed among them. Belyi asserted that the “sounds of war” had been audible long before 1914, and as the first forewarning of a coming clash of forces he singled out Blok’s poem “On the Field of Kulikovo” (“Na pole Kulikovom”, 1908) with its implicit expectation of a repetition of the year 1380.⁹ Belyi also regarded his own *Petersburg* (*Peterburg*) as prophetic. In the novel, the year 1913 was singled out as fateful,¹⁰ an assumption Belyi also attributed to the Russian peasantry.¹¹ Considering that Belyi had also seen the year 1912 as historically significant,¹² one should not overestimate his skills as a clairvoyant. In the case of Belyi and Blok, it was more a question of a general apocalyptic feeling which did not differentiate between war and revolution, and, what is more, not even between salvation and doom. Belyi was not surprised by the frailty of European culture, but the division of the European nations into two warring camps was something that neither he nor Blok had foreseen. In both of Belyi’s examples of symbolist clarity of vision, it was a fear of the “Mongolian threat” that dominated, and whether this force was given a

6 Even an acmeist poet like Anna Akhmatova detected a sinister connection between natural phenomena and international politics, as can be seen from the poem “Iul’ 1914” (Anna Akhmatova, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* /Leningrad, 1976/, pp. 106-7). First publ. in *V tylu: Literaturno-khudozhestvennyi al'manakh* (Petrograd, 1915), p. 13.

7 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 238.

8 Andrei Belyi, “Gremiashchaia tishina”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 15.3.1916 15442.

9 Andrei Belyi, *Vospominaniia o A.A. Bloke* (Munich, 1969), p. 741. For Belyi also, while he was working on the novel *Peterburg* in 1910-1911, the battle of Kulikovo was of great importance as a mystical prophecy of coming cataclysms. Its symbolic significance as Belyi saw it was nevertheless another than what Blok had put into it. For Blok, the battle of Kulikovo was to reappear as a domestic political affair, a clash between the masses and the intelligentsia of Russia (Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, pp. 249-53, “Na pole Kulikovom”).

10 Andrei Belyi, *Peterburg: Roman* (Moscow, 1978), p. 94; Belyi, *Vospominaniia o A.A. Bloke*, pp. 742-3.

11 Andrei Belyi, “Gorizont soznaniia”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 17.3.1916 15446.

12 L. Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman “Peterburg”* (Leningrad, 1988), p. 226.

literal or a symbolic interpretation, it had little to do with the year 1914 and the First World War. That both Belyi and Blok had interpreted the prewar “sounds” erroneously is also evident from their bewilderment at the outbreak of the war.

The third of the “younger symbolists”, Viacheslav Ivanov, also claimed to have had his forebodings. His poem “On the Oka before the War” (“Na Oke pered voinoi”, 1914) is composed of three “diary stanzas” from the week preceding the declaration of war, but it is obvious that the different parts were later moulded into an organic whole in order more fully to express feelings of growing alarm.¹³ A parallel is drawn between the poet’s as yet dim apprehensions and nature, which is preparing for a thunderstorm. An external sign of the tense situation is provided by the soldiers who march past the poet’s *dacha*. Behind the events a “solemn Fate” fulfilling its own hidden plans is perceived, but the historical reference to Dmitrii Donskoi also evokes expectations of a patriotic battle for freedom. “On the Oka before the War” somewhat unexpectedly ends with a vision of soldiers’ graves. It is, however, not a humanitarian protest against the war that emerges, but a solemn picture of harmony. The circle of life is closed, as Mother Earth receives her sons with a blessing. As a prophet, Ivanov, too, failed in 1914.¹⁴

Even Zinaida Gippius was filled with “strange alarm” on the eve of the war, if one chooses to view her poem “On the Threshold” (“U poroga”, 1913) as autobiographical. The persona anticipates only approaching darkness and sorrow for humankind. The problem was, as Vladimir Zlobin writes, that Gippius had no words to describe the danger and no clue where to expect the catastrophe from.¹⁵ It was only in the spring of 1914 in France that she first sensed the risk of a European war, as everybody seemed to be talking about an inevitable military conflict with Germany. Unable to combine these conversations with her own instinctive fears, she sided with the French people, seeing the prevailing mood as the correct identification of Germany as a threat to freedom.¹⁶

Konstantin Bal’mont claimed that he had known for many years that a war was inevitable, even if he had not revealed his apprehensions publicly. He did

13 Viacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. III (Bruxelles, 1979), pp. 526–7 (“Na Oke pered voinoi”). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl’* 12 (1914), pp. 1–2.

14 Twenty-four years later Ivanov added a fourth stanza (*ibid.*, pp. 527–8), retelling a nightmarish dream he claims to have had before the outbreak of the First World War. It is a horror-filled, ambiguous vision of a struggle between two evil forces with ensuing apocalyptic destruction. However, against the background of the poet’s wholehearted pro-war stance in the period 1914–1918, the new stanza had an inescapable taste of hindsight.

15 Vladimir Zlobin, *A Difficult Soul: Zinaida Gippius* (Berkeley, 1980), p. 156.

16 Z. Gippius, “Svoboda”, *Den’* 17.8.1914 221.

not at this point try to pass himself off as a visionary poet, but based his conclusions upon empirical observations. What he had seen in Germany during the preceding decade, including the prevailing attitude towards the Russians, had convinced him that the Germans were preparing themselves materially and mentally for armed conflict. The war was thus not the result of unfortunate coincidences but “premeditated murder”.¹⁷

The outbreak of the war ought not to have come as a surprise for Dmitrii Merezhkovskii. Despite his millenarian orientation, he was acutely aware of the inherent dangers of the armaments race and growing nationalistic tendencies in modern Europe. In a prewar article, “On the Road to Emmaus” (“Na puti v Emmaus”, 1913), he wrote: “The spirit of murder is already spreading all over Europe. Armed people are ready to throw themselves at each other, like drunken cut-throats or beasts, in order to start a slaughter of a kind that the world has never seen.”¹⁸ Gippius later also recalled the inexplicable mood of depression that gripped her husband in the spring of 1914.¹⁹ In spite of his misgivings and premonitions, Merezhkovskii, nevertheless, afterwards preferred to stress the common psychological unpreparedness and mood of delusion: “Strange that we were all as blind as newly born puppies. Not foreseeing anything a day, an hour, a short moment in advance. As in the days of Noah, before the Flood, we ate, drank, squabbled. And even when we saw, we still did not believe.”²⁰ Belyi and Ivanov were to use the same simile of the Flood, but while they identified themselves with those saved, Merezhkovskii included himself among the victims of the catastrophe. The war was a shared tragedy, and the solution that he set out to find had therefore to be universal.

During the spring and early summer of 1914 Fedor Sologub had travelled throughout a Europe that was soon to burst into flames. His “Parisian Songs” (“Parizhskie pesni”) were an attempt to sum up his impressions.²¹ Beneath the peaceful idyll, a feeling of looming danger is apparent. Sologub sees Europe as divided, but not along national lines, as Gippius and Bal'mont did. In the poem, the oppressed German and French proletariat is waiting for the moment of revolution to come. The analysis is Marxist, though Sologub is not

¹⁷ “U K.D. Bal'monta”.

¹⁸ D.S. Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet: Dnevnik 1910-1914* (Petrograd, 1915), p. 13 (“Na puti v Emmaus”).

¹⁹ Zinaida Gippius, *Zhivye litsa: Vol. II. Vospominaniia* (Tbilisi, 1991), p. 292.

²⁰ D.S. Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik: 1914-1916* [On the cover: *Ot voiny k revoliutsii: Dnevnik 1914-1917*] (Petrograd, 1917), p. 183 (“Dva Islama”). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 13.11.1914 262.

²¹ Sologub, *Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 390-2 (“Parizhskie pesni”).

inspired so much by the demands of the working class for justice as by a wish to see the bourgeoisie punished for its thoughtless life of pleasure. The hope for a coming *nemesis* is combined with a longing for moral purification. As a prophecy of the immediate future, "Paris songs" was not clear-sighted, but it was revealing about Sologub's state of mind on the threshold of the war. The former iconoclast had turned into a stern moralist for whom modern Europe had come to be equated with depravity. The war offered itself as a remedy.

When Sologub afterwards depicted the outbreak of the war, it was consistently the general unpreparedness that he stressed. Russians and Baltic Germans are enjoying the summer side by side on the Estonian coast,²² and everywhere in Europe people are deeply convinced that peace is unshakable: "Everyone was living a peaceful life, as at the foot of a long since dormant volcano on the eve of a sudden eruption. And nobody knew that they would all soon be carried away by the mighty stream of world events."²³ The volcano as an apocalyptic symbol had already been used in *A Legend in the Making*. It could now be seen that the volcano had not been extinguished and that belief in a lasting peace had been an unforgivable illusion. In the whirl of events an interpreting voice was needed, and this was the task that Sologub took upon himself.

Exactly a month after the shot in Sarajevo, Aleksandr Blok noted in passing in his note-book: "There is a smell of war (Austria – Serbia – Russia)."²⁴ At this point intuition was no longer needed to perceive the "smell", as the press was full of speculation about the possibility of war. The following day Blok could already read about Austria-Hungary's declaration of war on Serbia. In Russia, fraternal feelings for the Serbians were manifested in the streets, and the armed forces were mobilized. Germany chose to interpret the Russian mobilization as an act of aggression and declared war on 19 July (1 August). Russia thereby became involved in a war which within a few days included all the Great Powers of Europe.

The outbreak of war might have come as a surprise, but once it was a fact, it already appeared as predetermined, unavoidable, and even explicable. The immediate reactions of the Russian symbolists varied from rejoicing to depression, from outbursts of creativity to silence. The individual poses that were struck would be maintained for a long time. The two poles were occupied by Sologub and Belyi. While the former turned into a patriot and launched into

22 Fedor Sologub, *Iaryi god: Rasskazy* (Moscow, 1916), pp. 5-24 ("Pravda serdtsa").

23 *Ibid.*, p. 177 ("Den' vstrech").

24 Aleksandr Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki: 1901-1920* (Moscow, 1965), p. 234.

a hectic writing period, the latter went inward in a tormenting guilty search and, shattered by the turn of events, for a time even lost the capacity for artistic communication.

The metamorphosis of Sologub was striking. In the poem “God against the Attacker” (“Na nachinaishchego Bog”), dated one week after the beginning of the war, he elucidated in three forceful stanzas his attitude towards the events:

God against the attacker!
Believe the wise prophecy.
He who sends neighbours evil deaths
shall succumb himself before his time.

God against the attacker!
His strongholds shall turn to dust,
and to impotence shall the Lord
condemn him, the fomenter of anxieties.

God against the attacker!
His fist is in armour of iron,
but it will shatter over the abyss
against our unshakeable hall.*²⁵

Sologub adopted the stance of a patriot. Where earlier he had fostered the image of the isolated poet, he now spoke with authority for the whole nation. The intonation is solemn and the style rhetorical and archaic. While an abundant, uncritical use of the patriotic topoi diminished the literary value of this and later poems, it effectively served to change the general image of Sologub from a representative of decadence to a national poet, preoccupied with the historical moment and the fate of Russia. The words of wisdom that he implicitly referred to in “God against the Attacker” are “All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matth. 26:52). The symbolist poet has assumed the role of agent between the higher realms and man, a mediator of profound

* “Na nachinaishchego Bog! Veshchan'iu mudromu pover'te./ Kto shlet sosediam zlye smerti,/ Tot sam do sroka iznemog./ Na nachinaishchego Bog! Ego tverdyni stanut pyl'iu,/ I obrechets Gospod' bessil'iu/ Ego, zachinshchika trevog./ Na nachinaishchego Bog! Ego kulak v brone zheleznoi,/ No razob'etsia on nad bezdnoi/ O nash nezyblemyi chertog.”

25 Fedor Sologub, *Voina: Stikhi* (Petrograd, 1915), p. 6 (“Na nachinaishchego Bog”). First publ. in *Voina: Al'manakh* (Moscow, 1914).

truths. The prophetic tone of the poem is strengthened by the Biblical vocabulary and the sharp contrasts: what has been a stronghold will be turned to dust. As Germany and Russia are not openly mentioned, the eternal validity of these words is stressed. The immediate significance of the poem is, nevertheless, obvious: Germany had pronounced the declaration of war and thereby condemned itself to ruin.

In “God against the Attacker” God is the guarantee that the Russians will be victorious. Previously Sologub had the reputation of being a satanist. Satan, the Prince of Death, was the benefactor of mankind, while God, the sustainer of life, was the evil force of existence. Now the past was forgotten, when without any visible hesitation Sologub enrolled the God of Christianity on Russia’s side in the war. He did it in a striking line – “Na nachinaiushchego Bog” – where the explosive sound “Bog” (God) is fired like a cannon ball against the foe after three aggressively rattling “na” (on) and a menacingly hissing fricative “shch”. Behind the cliché of God as an ally in the war lay a wish to detect a spiritual pattern behind the events. The decisive factors could not be military strength and strategy, but idealistic categories like “right”, “truth” and “God”. The elucidation of the spiritual basis of the war not only offered an understanding of the present moment, but it also made the future visible.

On the same day that the Russian newspapers carried the news about the German declaration of war, Valerii Briusov commented on the events in the poem “The Last War” (“Posledniaia voina”):

It came to pass. Fate with its stern hand
slightly raised the curtain of the times.
Before us the visages of a new life
seethe like a wild dream.

Cloaking capitals and villages,
flags have gone up, blustering.
Across the pastures of ancient Europe
the last war is being waged.

And all that with fruitless ardour
centuries have fearfully quarrelled about,
war is ready to settle
with one blow of its iron hand.

But hark! From constrained hearts
hasn’t a voice of hope sprung up?

The call of enslaved tribes
bursts into a war cry.

From the tramp of armies, the roar of guns,
from the buzzing flights of Nieuports,
all that, like a marvel, we
have dreamed of may rise up.

Yes! Too long have we been sluggish
and Belshazzar's feast has lingered on!
May there appear from the fiery font
a world transfigured!

May the shaky structure of centuries
fall into a bloody chasm!
In glory's flickering illumination
let the coming world be new!

May the arches of old collapse,
may the pillars fall with a boom –
And let the beginning of peace and freedom
be a frightful year of struggle.*²⁶

The word “curtain” (*zavesa*) of the first stanza carries an allusion to the world of the theatre. Alone among the symbolists Brisuov was frequently to use the expression the “theatre of war”. The choice of metaphor is revealing. As a Russian patriot, Brisuov had an interest in the outcome of the war, but essentially

* “Svershilos'. Rok rukoi surovoy/ Pripodnial zavesu vremen./ Pred nami liki zhizni novoi/ Volnuiutsia, kak dikii son.// Pokryv stolitsy i derevni,/ Vzvilis', bushuia, znamena./ Po pazhitiam Evropy drevnei/ Idet posledniaia voina.// I vse, o chem s besplodnym zharom/ Puglivo sporili veka,/ Gotova razreshit' udarom/ Ee zheleznaia ruka.// No vslushaites! V serdtsakh stesnennykh/ Ne golos li nadezhd voznik?/ Prizyv plemen poraboshchennykh/ Vryvaetsia v voennyi krik.// Pod topot armii, grom orudii,/ Pod n'iuporov gudiashchii let,/ Vse to, o chem my, kak o chude,/ Mechtali, mozhnet byt', vstaet.// Tak! slishkom dolgo my kosneli/ I dlili valtasarov pir! Pust', pust' iz ognennoi kupeli/ Preobrazhennym vyidet mir!// Pust' padaet v proval krovavyi/ Stroen'e shatkoe vekov,/ V nevernom ozaren'i slavy/ Griadushchii mir da budet nov!// Pust' rushatsia bylye svody,/ Pust' s gulom padaiut stolby, –/ Nachalom mira i svobody/ Da budet strashnyi god bor'by!”

26 Brisuov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, pp. 140-1 (“Posledniaia voina”). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl'* 8-9 (1914), p. 241.

it was for him a grand, historical event that he had the privilege of witnessing. It is with great anticipation that, in "The Last War", Briusov sits down to watch the majestic play begin. The director is not an individual or a nation but inscrutable Fate. The prominent place of Fate in Briusov's thought has been pointed out by Ivanov,²⁷ among others, and the poet's usually dispassionate attitude to the events and phenomena that he describes can partly be explained by fatalism. Unlike Sologub, Briusov did not acknowledge any divine guidance in war, and the attempts to predict the outcome of the drama in "The Last War" look more like wishful thinking than visionary knowledge.

Sologub rejoiced at finding the word "transfiguration" (*preobrazhenie*) used in "The Last War".²⁸ For him Briusov's poem provided proof that a common symbolist view of the war did exist. The war was the judgement of a world that had exhausted its strength, but also the purgatory from which humanity would rise transformed. All this is indeed to be found in "The Last War", but at the same time the poem is unmistakably typical of its author. Briusov did not profess any apocalyptic religion, and in his other works there are few if any predictions about a transfigured humanity of the future. The accent in "The Last War" is as much upon destruction as upon birth. Images of collapsing columns and arches arouse associations with classical times and the fall of the Roman Empire, a period which had always fascinated Briusov. In "The Last War" a civilization is perishing, but its literary genre is not tragedy. It displays the same psychological pattern as is found in Briusov's famous, early poem "Huns of the Future" ("Griadushchie gunny", 1905). The poet anticipates with unconcealed relish the destruction of his own world.²⁹ During the first months of the war the split in Briusov between the "Hun" and the refined Westerner was clearly visible. Where "The Last War" expresses delight at the sight of Europe writhing on the bonfire of the war, one finds for example in "To the Teuton" ("Tevtonu") an indignant protest against German assaults on masterpieces of European culture.³⁰

Why was Briusov prepared, like a vengeful god, to let Europe perish in a "bloody abyss"? In the poem he refers obscurely to a Belshazzar's feast that has continued heedless of all warnings. He is equally allusive in the parallel poem "When I look into the December dusk of the night..." ("Kogda smotriu v dekabr'skii sumrak nochii..."), where the old world is compared to

27 Viacheslav Ivanov, "O tvorchestve Valerii Briusova", *Utro Rossii* 17.3.1916 77.

28 Sologub, "Derzanie do kontsa".

29 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 1, p. 433 ("Griadushchie gunny").

30 *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 157 ("Tevtonu"). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl'* 10 (1914), p. 166.

Atlantis, ready to sink into the depths of the ocean, accompanied by no funeral speeches. Lies, injuries and crushed dreams form the list of crimes which sink the continent.³¹ In "The Last War" it is above all the nationality question that Briusov singles out as a neglected and therefore inflamed problem. But in this connection, too, he confines himself to vague hints: "The call of enslaved tribes bursts into a war cry." An implicit interpretation of these lines was made by the Russian censor who struck them out together with the whole of the last stanza, when the poem was to be reprinted in an anthology in 1915.³² But was it really a prophecy of rebellion and a fight for freedom within the borders of Russia that Briusov had in mind? In Germany hopes existed that the war would encourage freedom movements among the Finns, Balts and Poles, but the thought that Briusov would also have wished to see internal unrest in a warring Russia is completely out of the question.

Briusov's political dreams at the beginning of the century had been connected with the Russian Empire as a World Power. The poem "The Double-Headed Eagle" ("Orel dvuglavyi"), written shortly before the outbreak of the World War, showed that these attitudes had not undergone any substantial change. In an allegorical form, the disappointed chauvinist mocks the Russian eagle, who had once been feared and famous, but is now purblind and wing-clipped and has cravenly chosen to stay out of all fights, confining itself once in a while to frightening small birds. "The Double-Headed Eagle" could only be published after the February revolution because of its criticism of Grigorii Rasputin. The reason for Briusov's dissatisfaction with the notorious adventurer is revealing: Rasputin was against an aggressive foreign policy, which aimed at the expansion of Russia's might.³³

Imperialism was also the theme of two articles, "The Universal War" ("Vsemirnaia voina") and "The War outside Europe" ("Voina vne Evropy"), published during the first month of the war.³⁴ Briusov discussed authoritatively the European colonies and their possible role in the war. Contrary to what has been claimed,³⁵ he did not protest against European colonialism, but only

31 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 336 ("Kogda smotriu v dekabr'skii sumrak nochii..."). First publ. in 1928.

32 Valerii Briusov, "Posledniaia voina", in *V tylu*, p. 21.

33 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, pp. 225-6 ("Orel dvuglavyi").

34 Valerii Briusov [pseud. V. Bakulin], "Vsemirnaia voina", *Russkie vedomosti* 31.7.1914 175; Valerii Briusov, "Voina vne Evropy", *Russkaia mysl'* 8-9 (1914), pp. 131-41.

35 G.I. Derbenev, "Valerii Briusov v nachale pervoi mirovoi voiny", in *Briusovskie chteniia 1971 goda* (Erevan, 1973), pp. 175-6.

pleaded for a policy that would take into consideration the historical traditions of the colonies and the feelings of the local populations. Briusov had, as shown above,³⁶ seen and accepted imperialism as the dominant trait of the 20th century. This was also his basic attitude as far as the different nationalities within Russia were concerned. On his way to Warsaw in August 1914, Briusov met ardent White Russian, Lithuanian and Polish nationalists in Vilnius. In a letter to his wife he commented on their inflammatory speeches: "Oh! Russia is facing the great task of welding all this together!"³⁷

Who then were the "enslaved" people whose "call" was going to turn into "a war cry"? What was it that had been dreamt of "as a wonder"? "The Last War" was written at a time when the independence of Serbia and Belgium was not yet under threat, and it is therefore more likely that Briusov was referring to Slavs, in the first place Poles, Ukrainians and Ruthenians, who in 1914 were partly or completely under German and Austrian rule. In 1903 Briusov had expressed his sympathy with Pan-Slavism as a natural synthesis of nationalism and imperialism. The "German danger" alone was sufficient to force the Slavonic peoples to unite, but of even greater importance for Briusov was the fact that "Slavonic discord" was an anachronism in the century of imperialism.³⁸ Russia had a historical mission, in which all the Slavonic peoples, united by blood and partly also by religion, were to play an important role.³⁹ One can therefore say that the hope and the dream that are mentioned in "The Last War" belong rather to Briusov than to the peoples in question.⁴⁰ The "transfigured world" that Briusov envisaged thus refers not to a spiritually enlightened humanity, as Sologub thought, but to visible changes on the map of the world.

36 See p. 13.

37 Quoted in Semen Bukchin, "Korrespondent Valerii Briusov", *Neman* 6 (1987), p. 138.

38 Briusov, "V etu minutu istorii", p. 166.

39 Val[erii] Br[iusov], "Razreshenie makedonskogo voprosa", *Novyi put'* 3 (1903), p. 231.

40 G. Lelevich (*V.Ia. Briusov* /Moscow-Leningrad, 1926/, pp. 40-1, 165) is of the opinion that it was Briusov's love for might and grand-scale thinking that brought him close to the Russian imperialists but Lelevich denies that the poet would have become a consistent spokesman of imperialism. A later commenter plainly denies that Briusov showed any interest in territorial conquests and talks only vaguely about the "militaristic shade" that the author's "national pride" sometimes took (B.M. Sivovolov, "K istorii ideino-khudozhestvennoi evoliutsii V. Briusova v period pervoi mirovoi voiny", in *Nauchnye zapiski Khar'kovskogo pedagogicheskogo instituta imeni G.S. Skovorody, kafedra russkoi i zarubezhnoi literatury*, vol. 27 /Kharkov, 1957/, pp. 89, 101). However, hard facts – both from the beginning of the century and the period of war – contradict these and other similar claims, displaying instead Briusov as one of the most pronounced imperialists among the Russian writers.

The apocalyptic atmosphere that is conjured up in “The Last War” hardly corresponds to the alleged pent-up love of liberty of enslaved nations. It can rather be explained as a subconscious inclination for chaos and a belief that renewal is possible only through the destruction of the old. It is also unclear how the solving of the problems of nationality could establish the eternal peace that is promised in the title of the poem. As recently as the previous year Briusov, in his article “A New Epoch in World History” (“Novaia epokha vo vsemirnoi istorii”), had envisaged, instead of universal peace, a long line of future, military conflicts.⁴¹ One possible explanation for his change of opinion is that he assumed that the present war would grow to such dimensions that it alone would settle all conflicts.

The oracular obscurity of “The Last War” even gives the poem a revolutionary ring and saved it from being merely a rhymed political pamphlet. Here, as in other poems, Briusov deliberately avoided unambiguous and outspoken statements. For the poet this decision was a victory, but it also meant that for the time being Briusov confined himself to the role of a spectator and did not entertain the possibility of influencing and inspiring his readers.

According to his own testimony Konstantin Bal'mont greeted the outbreak of the war exultantly.⁴² The war had been unavoidable, as Germany had been preparing for military conflict for years, and the only way to overcome the threat and secure progress in Europe had been to accept the challenge:

It was better to endure the most terrible, hard struggle, it was better to lay numerous and heavy sacrifices on the altar of progress, than forever to breathe the poisoned air of menace, perpetually, day in, day out, to be aware day and night that the enemy is close, that the enemy and aggressor is not far away, that he is behind the wall, forging, sharpening his weapon, threatening, scorning, lying, cheating, stifling, behaving shamelessly.⁴³

Bal'mont was able to tell the Russian public about his feelings only in May 1915, having been separated from his native country by the front line all through the winter, but his conviction that the decision to wage war had been justified was still unshaken.

⁴¹ Briusov, “Novaia epokha vo vsemirnoi istorii”, p. 105.

⁴² “U K.D. Bal'monta”.

⁴³ Konstantin Bal'mont, “Narod-khudozhnik”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 5.7.1915 14945. Abbr. in K.D. Bal'mont, *Gde moi dom? Ocherki 1920-1923* (Prague, 1924), pp. 117-23.

As for Viacheslav Ivanov, his initial reaction was more complicated, as can be seen from the poem “Petrovskoe on the Oka” (“Petrovskoe na Oke”). The first part, separately published in January 1915 as “The Past Summer” (“Minuvshee leto”),⁴⁴ conveys the poet’s emotional response to the outbreak of the war:

Shall I forget, in the fateful days
of a summer that nurtured the evil ear of corn,
the hospitable lights
of my poet-neighbour’s family?

Together we lit the candles
and carried out the icons,
while the universal storm
with seven thunderclaps spoke out

from far away... And in me
this reciprocity is alive forever,
like the participation in a vow
by those saved on the same boat.*⁴⁵

A parallel has been drawn between “Petrovskoe on the Oka” and a poem by Aleksandr Blok, “Yes. Thus dictates inspiration...” (“Da. Tak diktuet vdokhnoven’e...”, 1911, publ. 1915).⁴⁶ But where Blok’s “great thunderstorm” is an undisguised reference to a coming, cleansing social upheaval, Ivanov uses the thunderstorm as a metaphor for war. As such it was traditional and universal, but Ivanov gave it a personal touch by talking about a “universal (*vselenskaia*) storm”, thus stressing the metaphysical significance of events more than their grand scale. Another central metaphor is the “evil ear of corn” of the summer of 1914. Agricultural metaphors of sowing and harvest, virgin soil and cornfields occupy a prominent place in Ivanov’s poems of the period. They conveyed not only a belief that the war was predetermined by a string of human

* “Zabudu l’ v rokovye dni/ Vzrastivshego zloi kolos leta,/ Sem’i sosedstvennoi poeta/ Gostepriimnye ogni?// My vmeste zazhigali svechi/ I vynosili obraza,/ Kogda vselenskaia groza/ Sem’iu gromami izdaleche// Zagovorila... I vo mne/ Navek zhiva vzaimnost’ eta,/ Kak souchastie obeta/ Spasennykh na odnom chelne.”

44 Viacheslav Ivanov, “Minuvshee leto”, in *Nevskii al’mannah zhertvam voiny: Pisateli i khudozhniki* (Petrograd, 1915).

45 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 528 (“Petrovskoe na Oke”).

46 Ivanov, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, p. 492.

and divine decisions and actions, but also an expectation of organic growth and change. However, the fear that events could be of a sinister quality can only be found in "Petrovskoe on the Oka".

In Ivanov's poem a crack opens wide between the private and the public worlds, visually represented by the use of enjambement. As the thunderstorm approaches menacingly and darkness covers the earth, the poet seeks refuge in a religiously coloured feeling of community with his neighbours (in reality the poet Iurgis Baltrushaitis and his wife). The spiritual lifeboat that Ivanov enters is modest and fragile compared to Noah's ark, the metaphor that Belyi was to evoke in Dornach, but with this slightly panic-stricken poem Ivanov overcame his anxiety and moved from the sphere of bewildering private experiences to the vast field of abstract ideas. Ivanov viewed poetry as a communal action, transcending everything personal,⁴⁷ and this was also to be the program that he followed in the war.

Even if there had been a mood of anticipation in France in the spring, the outbreak of a European war still came as a shock to Zinaida Gippius and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii. They were the only symbolists who had repudiated war in principle long before 1914,⁴⁸ and their spontaneous reaction in July 1914 was consistently to look at events from a universal point of view. The war appeared to them to be a mad, organized, collective suicide.⁴⁹ This was the basic essence of every war which no argument could change. "Is it right to wage war? How can the war be justified? What is the meaning of the war? No matter how these questions are answered, horror remains horror", Merezhkovskii wrote.⁵⁰ Nothing positive could emerge from a war, and when gazing into the future, Gippius anticipated only terror.⁵¹ In the "war aphorisms" that Merezhkovskii published in August his hopes were connected with peace and not with war: "Peace is an inevitability, war is something accidental."⁵² His last aphorism was taken straight from the Bible (Isaiah 2:4) about swords being beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks. Merezhkovskii's initial utopia was of a Christian kind, concerned not so much with Russia as with the whole of mankind.

47 James West, *Russian Symbolism: A Study of Vyacheslav Ivanov and the Russian Symbolist Aesthetic* (London, 1970), p. 97.

48 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, pp. 245, 293.

49 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 237.

50 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 175 ("Voina i religia"). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 30.11.1914 276.

51 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 235.

52 D. Merezhkovskii, "Mysli o voine", *Den'* 20.8.1914 224.

Of the other symbolists Andrei Belyi came closest to a similar reaction. He has given a vivid account of the day when the inhabitants of Dornach received the news about the war:

The days were stuffy and hot; and the days were menacing; the telegrams were discussed intensively; and they argued among themselves: the Swiss, the Germans, the Austrians, the Poles; fervent, young voices rang out; outbursts of laughter rang out: nobody wanted yet to believe in a war; but then it broke out. It was close to evening, at sunset: the sunset was crimson; the peaks of Alsace were glowing pink; suddenly the news came: war in spite of everything. How distinctly I still remember it: my friend, a black-moustached, stately Bavarian comes running to me in an agitated mood, takes me by the hand and says with a smile: "Are we enemies now?" Without a word I pressed his hand (...).⁵³

The peculiar thing about Belyi's situation in 1914 was the international atmosphere in which he was living. All nationalities of the coming war were represented at the Steiner colony. The anthroposophists did not form a pacifist opposition and many of them would in fact leave Dornach to participate in the war. Even so the handshake of the Russian Andrei Belyi and the German Strauss had a deep symbolic meaning. The enemy nation, too, consisted of individuals for whom the war was a tragedy, and altruistic behaviour was possible on both sides. Strauss joined the war in order to take care of prisoners of war and from Belyi he quickly learned some Russian words in order to be able to communicate with Russian prisoners.⁵⁴ Belyi was not to follow the example of his German friend, but for the greater part of the war he remained faithful to this instinctive internationalist outburst. When he finally came to analyze the reasons for the war, his starting point was that all nations shared responsibility for the tragedy and that any division between Germany and Russia was superficial.

Realities of the War

Valerii Briusov as War Correspondent

The majority of established Russian writers were far beyond the age of conscription in 1914. Of the symbolists only Aleksandr Blok and Andrei Belyi, both

⁵³ Belyi, "Gremiashchaia tishina".

⁵⁴ Andrei Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere* (Paris, 1982), pp. 269-70.

around thirty years old, might have been called to arms, something which at this point, however, seemed unlikely. For those who were too old to be conscripts, there was the possibility of doing voluntary work as medical orderlies or working as war correspondents. However, of the symbolists, only Valerii Briusov showed interest in getting closer to the actual fighting. On receiving the news about the outbreak of war, he immediately left his dacha and travelled to Moscow.⁵⁵ A week later, on 24 July, the Moscow Literature and Art Circle could mark its president's appointment as correspondent for the Moscow newspaper *Russkie vedomosti* in Poland.⁵⁶ Work as a journalist was foreign to Briusov, but it tempted him with the opportunity to witness how world history was being shaped. In his speech, he commented that the moment was of such universal importance that it was inappropriate to praise individuals. Even art was now of minor significance, and Briusov asked those present to forget him as a writer, as he was now about to leave for Poland as "a simple labourer".⁵⁷ These words reveal how strong an impact the declaration of war had made upon Briusov. Self-confident and highly ambitious, he had always asserted the primacy of art and his own central place in contemporary Russian literature, but now he downgraded himself to becoming one of a number of war correspondents.

Briusov was prepared to leave at once, but unforeseen obstacles arose. The Moscow town governor did not hesitate to give him the necessary certificate of loyalty,⁵⁸ but the Russian General Staff was late in giving journalists permission to travel to the front. After waiting for three weeks Briusov decided to head for Warsaw on his own responsibility.⁵⁹ He was never to receive official status as a war correspondent, something which would seriously hamper his work in Poland. This odd situation shows how unprepared and ill-equipped the Russian authorities were to exploit writers in mobilizing popular sentiment in support of the war.

On 14 August Briusov left Moscow. The closer he got to the war, the happier he felt at heart. All doubts about Russia's ability to wage war evaporated, as

55 Briusova, p. 138.

56 "Tubilei, bankety, privetstviia i pr.", *Izvestiia Moskovskogo literaturno-khudozhestvennogo krughka* 7 (1914), p. 39. Briusov also worked as a correspondent for the newspaper *Golos* (Iaroslav). See G.V. Murzo, "V. Briusov – voennyi korrespondent Iaroslavskogo 'Golosa'", in *Politika i poetika: Russkaia literatura v istoriko-kulturnom kontekste Pervoi mirovoi voyny. Publikatsiia, issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow, 2014), pp. 567-78.

57 *Valerii Briusov v avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh...*, p. 321.

58 Sivovolov, p. 73.

59 Derbenev, p. 180.

he everywhere saw proof of self-confidence and calm. Veterans of the Turkish and Japanese Wars had again put on their uniforms. Soldiers who had taken part in the first battles in East Prussia were longing for new skirmishes. "One feels that the whole army has realized the seriousness of the present struggle and is filled by a wish to fight and secure victory for Russia at all costs", Briusov wrote in one of his first-hand reports.⁶⁰ Everywhere Briusov encountered a conviction that Russia would emerge from the war victorious, and as one of his most important duties as a journalist he adopted the task of communicating and strengthening this confidence in the Russian army.

His first encounter with Warsaw also brought a sense of relief. Briusov had felt unsure about the attitude of the Poles towards the Russians, but in the political and literary circles to which he was introduced, he found that the war against a common enemy had visibly improved relations. In addition, the Polish manifesto, issued by Russia's Supreme Commander in Chief, the Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, had helped to clear the air. "Down Warsaw's streets for the first time/ I walk alone, light-hearted" ("V pervyi raz po ulitsam Varshavy/ S legkim serdtsem prokhozhu odin"), Briusov wrote frankly in a poem under the impression of his recent arrival in Warsaw.⁶¹

With Warsaw as his headquarters Briusov started to make journeys to different parts of the front line. As he had neither received official permission to work as a war correspondent, nor had been accredited by the influential Union of Zemstvos, every journey involved a dispute with the military bureaucracy. Briusov was seldom on the list of journalists permitted to visit the immediate vicinity of the fighting, and his situation only became more tolerable after he had been formally accepted as a co-worker by the Polish Red Cross.⁶² *Russkie vedomosti* expected two reports per week from him and preferably first hand reports from places close to the military action.⁶³ Briusov gathered material through conversations with officers and soldiers, patients in field hospitals and local Poles.

In late August and early September Briusov visited some small Polish towns north of Warsaw, and a few weeks later he made his first journey to the occupied territory of Galicia. Unlike the inhabitants of East Prussia, the local Galician population had not fled from the Russian troops, a fact that Briusov explained by referring to the disciplined behaviour of the Russian soldiers: "Here,

60 Valerii Briusov, "Rasskazy ochevidtsev", *Russkie vedomosti* 22.8.1914 192.

61 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 11, p. 149 ("V Varshave"). First publ. in *Russkie vedomosti* 3.9.1914 202.

62 Bukchin, pp. 148-9.

63 Sivovolov, pp. 80-81, 85.

as everywhere, Russian troops have behaved with consideration and care towards the local population and its belongings.”⁶⁴ The picture that Briusov gave of the Russian army was highly idealized. In Galicia, the soldiers did not take revenge for the devastation of Polish towns near the German border, but they offered payment for everything they took: “While the Germans rob the towns they take and ruin them by demanding goods, we enrich the Galicia that we have taken possession of.”⁶⁵

On 19 September (2 October) Briusov arrived in Jarosław as one of the first journalists after the Russians captured the town. Austrian policemen were still maintaining law and order, but Russian officers and soldiers were seen everywhere. The Russian rouble was accepted in shops and restaurants. The population of Jarosław had elected to stay almost in its entirety, and the prevailing attitude towards the Russians appeared to be friendly.⁶⁶ Briusov reported with pride that not a single pane of glass had been broken by the Russians. He interpreted the exemplary behaviour of the soldiers as a sign of them being aware that they were on ancient Russian soil.⁶⁷ This was a precious thought to the imperialistically-minded Briusov. The Russian army’s offensive into Galicia was the beginning of a resurrection of the ancient Kievan Russia,⁶⁸ and thus the fulfillment of one of the dreams he had referred to in the poem “The Last War”. The territory was being returned to its legitimate owners.⁶⁹ In the poem “In the Carpathians” (“Na Karpatakh”), written barely a month after his trip to Jarosław, this argument was further elaborated. Galicia was the cradle from which the Slavonic tribes had once migrated. The common ancestral soil had subsequently fallen into a state of degradation that had lasted nearly 600 years. Briusov refrained from mentioning that the area had come under Polish control after the dissolution of the Russian principality, and thus in fact remained Slavonic. Instead he appealed to the emotions of his readers by a heartbreaking personification of Galicia: “For so long under the enemy’s yoke/ the land has languished like a slave.” (“Tak dolgo pod vrazheskim igom,/ Slovno rab, tomivshiisia krai.”)⁷⁰ The Slavonic tribes had sworn to return to

64 Valerii Briusov, “Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: III. Po Galitsii”, *Russkie vedomosti* 27.9.1914 222.

65 Valerii Briusov, “Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: IV. Iaroslav”, *Russkie vedomosti* 28.9.1914 223.

66 Valerii Briusov, “Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: V. Obratnyi put’”, *Russkie vedomosti* 3.10.1914 227.

67 Briusov, “Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: III. Po Galitsii”.

68 Valerii Briusov, “Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: I. Liublin”, *Russkie vedomosti* 21.9.1914 217.

69 Briusov, “Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: III. Po Galitsii”; Briusov, “Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: V. Obratnyi put’”.

70 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 145 (“Na Karpatakh”). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl’* 1 (1915), p. 1.

the Carpathians and now this promise was fulfilled “to the thunder of victory” (“pod grokhot pobedy”).⁷¹ As a result of the war, Galicia was called to a new life, and the darkness and the fog, which in the poem symbolize the gloom of life in Galicia before the arrival of the Russian troops, were dispersed. For Briusov the Russian conquest of Galicia also represented a *rapprochement* of the hitherto divided Slavs and a step towards their unification: “Set here the banner of unity/ of Slavs who have found one another!” (“Zdes’ postav’te stiaġ edinen’ia/ Nashedshikh drug druga slavian!”).⁷² The local Ruthenians had, according to Briusov, greeted the Russian troops as liberators. For them the Russians were their own people, whereas they felt no sympathy for the Austrians and the Austro-Hungarian army.⁷³ The Russian incorporation of Galicia was thus both historically and ethnically justified.

Four Russian correspondents managed to obtain permission to travel on from Jarosław to the most advanced front line. In a letter to his wife, Briusov complained that he was not one of these fortunate journalists, and he expressed fears that he would never get the chance to witness a real battle.⁷⁴ He would indeed never get closer than to within earshot of the line of fire. His most dangerous experiences were when on two different occasions grenades exploded about 200 feet away from him.

A visit in October to a battlefield close to Pruszkow, a small town southwest of Warsaw, was Briusov’s first close contact with the reality of war. A week earlier the German army had advanced right up to Warsaw, and it had already looked as if it would only be a matter of days before the Polish capital would have to surrender. On this occasion the German offensive was beaten back, and Briusov immediately went to see the places where the battles had been fought. In his reports, he depicts prisoners of war, fallen soldiers, carcasses of horses, wooden crosses, trenches, splinters of shell, and crushed tree-trunks. As usual, Briusov’s emotional response to the tragic side of war is subdued, and the stress is on military success. The defence of Warsaw is seen as a glorious page in the annals of Russian military history. After such a victory Briusov was even prepared to praise the strength of the German army. Its technical equipment was of the most modern kind and for every aeroplane that the Russians shot down, two new ones seemed to emerge. The trenches bore witness to planning and strategy, and the German maps looked most impressive

71 *Ibid.*

72 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

73 Briusov, “Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: III. Po Galitsii”; Briusov, “Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: V. Obratnyi put”.

74 Briusova, p. 139 (letter to his wife, 25 Sept. 1914).

to Russian eyes. Even if the German soldiers had behaved like barbarians, they had also shown great courage: "They are persistent in battle, walk straight into the artillery fire, and in a bayonet attack they are prepared to answer with bayonets; they are not capable of the panic which seizes the Austrian soldiers when faced with defeat."⁷⁵

In the middle of November Briusov went to Lodz, which shortly before had been liberated after a German occupation of three weeks. During his journey, he passed Lowicz, where violent battles were still being fought. The recapture of Lodz was for the Russians one of the crowning achievements of the first autumn of the war. In the tired faces of the German prisoners Briusov hopefully read that the war would soon be over. The stories that he heard from the people of Lodz strengthened his opinion that the German army was exhausted and badly demoralized. A wide gulf had opened between officers and soldiers, and their former calmness and stubbornness were gone. On the battle field outside Lodz, Briusov stood and contemplated the fallen German soldiers. Even if he complained that he lacked the composure to look at this scene, his description, nevertheless, reveals something of the frigidity that many have seen as a basic trait of his character:

The trenches are empty, but close to them, here and there, on their backs, with their faces downwards, on one side, with their arms stretched out or pressed to their breasts, with faces distorted by pain or strangely calm, lie the bodies of German soldiers. The majority of them are dressed in their dark uniforms; others are half-dressed: the boots and the jackets have been taken off; some are in Russian greatcoats that apparently have been put on as a protection against the cold. Among the dead are young men, almost boys, with gentle faces and hardly visible moustaches; there are also older people, serious-looking, around 40 years old, men who probably settled down long ago, never suspecting that they were doomed to die in alien Russia, on a snowy winter field (...).⁷⁶

In mid-November Briusov confidently predicted that soon the only Germans left in Poland would be wounded soldiers in hospitals.⁷⁷ A mere week later the fortunes of war changed, when the Germans recaptured Lodz. However, this event did not quite shake Briusov's conviction that the strength of the

⁷⁵ Valerii Briusov, "Na severnom fronte", *Russkie vedomosti* 12.10.1914 235.

⁷⁶ Valerii Briusov, "V tylu boia: Poezdka v Lovich", *Russkie vedomosti* 20.11.1914 268.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

German army had been exhausted. In his opinion the best-trained soldiers were on the Western front or had fallen, while old *Landsturm*-soldiers and school-children formed the bulk of the armies on the Eastern front. There were no longer any reserves to be thrown into battle, and because of this the German campaign against Russia would soon reach a critical stage. Briusov explained away the recent German successes at Lodz and Lowicz by claiming that the enemy soldiers had gone out to fight drunk, a widespread belief in Russia: "The Germans are brave and daring in attack, as before battle they intoxicate themselves with vodka and ether. The courage of the Russians is sober and conscious."⁷⁸

At the beginning of 1915 Briusov spent three weeks in Moscow, where he was given a grandiose reception. At a banquet on 18 January, arranged by the Moscow Literature and Art Circle, more than one hundred people, including Viacheslav Ivanov, gathered to celebrate the poet's visit. The old actor and playwright, Aleksandr Sumbatov-Iuzhin, praised Briusov not only as a poet, but also as a reporter and a keen-sighted observer of life. Pavel Miliukov, the leader of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, expressed his gratitude to Briusov and other war correspondents present for providing the members of the State Duma with valuable information about the war.⁷⁹

After yet another banquet in his honour, this time with the Society of Free Aesthetics as host, Briusov started back to Poland on 25 January. Compared to Moscow, Warsaw looked like a military camp with all its soldiers, prisoners of war, Red Cross ambulances, aeroplanes, and fresh news from the front. Briusov immediately resumed his travelling. A German offensive had begun in the northern parts of Poland, and Briusov made a trip to this area, bringing with him gifts for the soldiers from the Moscow Literature and Art Circle. Because of the ongoing battles, he was prevented from reaching the town of Przasnysz as planned. Even if the situation was serious, both civilians and the military regarded their proximity to the fighting with equanimity.

In Moscow Briusov had encountered the belief that war weariness was already widespread in the Russian army. When summing up his fresh observations for the single-issue publication *Den' pechati* in February 1915, he energetically denied this to be the case: "He who has the opportunity to acquaint himself with our army's life at the front, with its spirit, knows that one cannot talk about exhaustion as a widespread phenomenon: with an astonishing

⁷⁸ Valerii Briusov, "Vo chto by to ni stalo", *Russkie vedomosti* 21.11.1914 269.

⁷⁹ "Chestvovanie V.Ia. Briusova", *Izvestiia Moskovskogo literaturno-khudozhestvennogo krugha* 10 (1915), pp. 39-40.

cheerfulness the army continues to carry out its exploits and every day it brings us new examples of wonderful courage and genuine bravery.”⁸⁰

In March Briusov undertook a second journey to Galicia, this time in the company of the writer Aleksandr Fedorov, the correspondent for *Kievskaya mysl'*. Life in Jarosław had already returned to normal, and much to Briusov's satisfaction the occupied town showed clear signs of Russianization. The countryside, on the other hand, was marked by devastation and economic ruin. The car containing the two journalists was often surrounded by local peasants who wanted to know whom to turn to for help. Nevertheless, in spite of the enormous problems, Briusov could report about a generally benevolent attitude towards the new authorities.

There had already been rumours of the impending surrender of the strongly fortified Galician town of Przemyśl during his journey in September 1914. Now Briusov had the pleasure of visiting the town shortly after its capitulation, undoubtedly the greatest moment during his time as a war correspondent. The capture of Przemyśl was for him another glorious page in the annals of Russian military history.⁸¹ He dismissed all talk that the town had surrendered because of food shortages as lies. Through airlifts the inhabitants had been receiving help from the outside all the time, and therefore only the poor people of the town had lived in want. The explanation for the surrender was instead the demoralization and disorganization of the Austrian defenders and the courage and endurance of the Russian soldiers. When Briusov visited the surroundings of Przemyśl, he noticed how primitive the Russian positions had been, a fact that he chose to interpret in a positive light. Instead of relying on trenches and dugouts, the officers had trusted in the innate qualities of the Russian soldiers. Przemyśl was going to be the “pearl” in the new Russian province of Galicia. In spite of the fact that 44% of its population were Poles and 36% Jews, Briusov viewed it as a Russian town, stressing the ease with which people there, just like in the rest of Galicia, had grown used to the Russian presence. No conflicts between the occupiers and the city population had been reported.⁸²

Briusov made his last journey as a reporter in April 1915, when visiting the “town of G”. It had been under German rule since the turn of the year, but now – only temporarily, as it turned out – it had been recaptured by Russian forces.

80 Valerii Briusov, “Neutomimye”, *Den' pechati* 9.2.1915.

81 Valerii Briusov, “Iz poezdki v Peremyshl': II”, *Russkie vedomosti* 3.4.1915 75.

82 Valerii Briusov, “Vziaty Peremyshl'”, *Russkie vedomosti* 25.3.1915 68; Valerii Briusov, “Iz poezdki v Peremyshl'”, *Russkie vedomosti* 1.4.1915 73.

Until now Briusov had not had many problems with censorship,⁸³ but as the situation in Poland was growing more critical, it was, for example, no longer possible to spell out all geographical names in reports. Contrary to Briusov's predictions, the German armies had time and time again demonstrated an amazing ability to recover after their defeats. In March 1915 Briusov revealed for the first time a feeling of bewilderment. Military strategy was a strange field to him, but even so he had now come to realize that the situation was precarious.⁸⁴

Briusov did not witness the defeats of the summer of 1915. In May, he left Warsaw, as it happened, for good. According to his wife, he returned to Moscow disappointed and without any wish to work as a war correspondent any longer.⁸⁵ This claim cannot, however, be confirmed.⁸⁶ According to another source, Briusov planned to return to Poland after a short time.⁸⁷ Behind his disappointment clearly lay the absence of Russian victories and not, as Soviet literary critics subsequently claimed, a sudden awareness of the ugly imperialistic nature of the war.

The reasons why Briusov abandoned his work as a journalist were manifold. One was his wish to resume his creative writing and carry out the literary plans

83 Soviet critics have all – with little substantial evidence – blamed the tsarist censorship for the lack of an outspoken anti-war spirit in Briusov's writings. Derbenev (p. 180) and Bukchin (p. 148) claim that Briusov suffered badly from censorship, since the censors "felt" the "anti-militaristic spirit" of his texts. In reality, the few interferences with Briusov's texts, which can hardly be called "anti-militaristic", seem mainly to have concerned military information and naturalistic detail. Sivovolov (pp. 80 ff) devotes many pages to showing how difficult Briusov's relationship with the editorial board of *Russkie vedomosti* was, without, however, demonstrating that the conflicts concerned different outlooks on the World War. Briusov, to be fair, complained himself that some of his articles were left unpublished (quoted in Sivovolov, pp. 80, 89 n. 65), but the reasons seem to have been a content which was of no interest any longer or a general lack of space. For Briusov it was also difficult to accept that *Russkie vedomosti* had other journalists besides him in Poland.

84 Valerii Briusov, "V obstrelivaemom gorode: 26-go fevralia", *Russkie vedomosti* 4.3.1915 51.

85 Briusova, p. 139.

86 In an autobiographical sketch, written in the 1920's, Briusov himself talked about his disappointment, but compressing the whole war period into one single block, he deliberately distorted the true image of his development to suit Soviet expectations: "After [sic!] the German capture of Warsaw, I returned [from the front] to Moscow, deeply disappointed by the war, something which I then [sic!] also expressed in a poem ["Tridtsati mesiaty"], published in M. Gor'kii's "Novaia zhizn". (Valerii Briusov v avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh, p. 346.)

87 Derbenev, p. 187.

that he had been forced to postpone because of the war. Art should not surrender either to despotism or revolution, he had written in the autumn of 1905, and now he could, from experience, add yet another threat to art, namely war. It was his awareness from 1905 – “my real place is behind the writing desk”⁸⁸ – that had again woken. To start with, the intense work as a war correspondent had been an inspiring challenge. In an interview before the war, Briusov had explained that he needed peace and silence when writing: “I cannot work in a hurry, on order. I have always been amazed at people who are able to work hurriedly in literature, especially journalists.”⁸⁹ Now he had himself made an attempt to adopt this alien role, but it had only been a rewarding experience for a time.

In spite of the fact that the gulf between the educated classes and the Russian people had never been a burning issue for Briusov, there had also been a hint of the “repentant nobleman” in his activity. His work as a reporter allowed him to abandon his privileged existence and go out among the people. Briusov wrote to his wife in September 1914:

It might sound strange, but I like this kind of life. I have lived a peaceful life too long, going from my books to the affairs of the “Circle” and from the “Circle” back to my books. Now, when I am travelling in a car past our military positions, shaking in local post carriages, standing whole nights through in the corridors of overfull train carriages, I am resting. I look at this life as some kind of redemption.⁹⁰

That the reality of life for the officers and soldiers still differed greatly from that of the war correspondent was a painful experience for Briusov. When face to face with those who were fighting and dying for Russia his conscience perpetually tormented him. “You yourself want to participate in this difficult work, dig ditches to protect the sharpshooters, blow up bridges in order to make the movements of the enemy more difficult, put up barbed wire on poles”, he wrote apologetically in a report of September 1914.⁹¹ The feeling of being superfluous awoke in him when he was sitting writing in his comfortable hotel room, with the cannonade far away in the distance, or when for a moment he

88 *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: Valerii Briusov*, vol. 85, p. 680 (letter to S.A. Vengerov, 29 Oct. 1905).

89 A. Izmailov, *Literaturnyi Olimp: Kharakteristiki, vstrechi, portrety, avtografy* (Moscow, 1911), p. 396.

90 Quoted in Bukchin, p. 148.

91 Valerii Briusov, “Na pozitsiakh”, *Russkie vedomosti* 1.10.1914 225.

managed to forget the war in a discussion about poetry in a warm train compartment.⁹² All this was unjustifiable, as the “real cause of Russia is now out there, at the line of fire”.⁹³

Soon, too, the hardships and intense working pace started to exhaust him physically: “To travel 5-6 days in a motor car, in the cold, often without anything to drink or eat in the day, to sleep at night wherever you happen to lie down, afterwards when dead tired, chilled to the bone and half-ill write for 12-15 hours in a row so that you won’t fall behind other correspondents (...)”.⁹⁴ Worried about his health, his wife began to beg him to return. Pride, however, forbade Briusov from giving up his work for *Russkie vedomosti* too soon. To the very last he wanted to believe that the war would not be drawn out and that he would be able to witness the Russian armies entering Berlin. As late as 1 April 1915 Briusov wrote to his wife:

... it is a pity to abandon one’s work without finishing it. It is like not finishing a novel or a play. Later it will feel bad when I have to publish my reports under the title “The First Months of the War”. All the time I have the feeling that I just have to wait a little bit longer. And when I think that suddenly my successor will get the chance to enter Berlin in the wake of the Russian army, while I only “entered” Przemyśl, then, as Pushkin used to say, “my blood curdles”. How can I give up such an opportunity? And so I keep turning inside my own wheel.⁹⁵

The Theme of Life at the Front

The great, lasting poetry of the First World War was written by soldier-poets. Personal experience helped to create not only a more truthful attitude to the events, but also a style and a language that better corresponded to the nature of modern warfare than the clichés of traditional patriotic literature. The artistically most significant and humanly most moving sub-genre of the poetry of the First World War was therefore “front poetry”.

The Russian situation differs from that shared by the Germans, French and English. The established writers were too old to participate, and the majority of the younger poets, like Vladimir Maiakovskii, Velimir Khlebnikov, Igor’ Severin, Osip Mandel’shtam, Boris Pasternak and Sergei Esenin, were spared from

92 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, pp. 343-4 (“Mel’kali mimo snezhnye poliany...”). First publ. in 1928.

93 Briusov, “Na pozitsiakh”.

94 Quoted in Bukchin, p. 149.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

service at the front. As no major poet was “born” in the war, this leaves us with a small number of Russian writers who actually participated in the war and transmitted their feelings and thoughts in poems. To this group belong the acmeist Nikolai Gumilev, the futurists Nikolai Aseev, Konstantin Bol’shakov, Sergei Bobrov, Sergei Tret’iakov and Vadim Shershenevich, and a few young writers outside literary circles, like Nikolai Tikhonov and Valentin Kataev. However, the literary output of these soldier-poets was not very substantial, and, with Gumilev as the sole exception, this poetry passed unnoticed by the critics.

The only one of the symbolists to gain an insight into life on the battle field was Valerii Briusov. But even though he spent almost a year in the vicinity of the actual fighting and had innumerable opportunities to talk to soldiers and officers about their experiences, he never made an attempt to write dramatic monologues with soldiers as the personae. This was done by Fedor Sologub, Konstantin Bal’mont and Viacheslav Ivanov, poets who not only lacked Briusov’s first-hand experience, but also his hesitation when faced with the demanding task of giving poetic form to the psychological processes of participants in the war.

In his poetry about the front, Briusov confined himself to the perspective of an outsider. The choice of point of view corresponded both to his situation as a journalist and to his favourite stance as a curious but dispassionate witness of historical events. There was also a conflict between his symbolist poetics and the realities of the war. When Briusov left for Poland in the summer of 1914, he made a conscious choice between journalism and poetry. He had always valued art above all, but now he wanted to give priority to the historical moment. A decade earlier, during the 1905 revolution, Briusov had disputed the opinion that a poet best fulfilled his “civic duties” through poetry. The realm of poetry was for him “the secrets of the human soul” and not current socio-political questions.⁹⁶ Even if in practice Briusov did not always consistently follow his own maxim, it still formed the basis of his poetics in 1914. If he wished to participate in the war, it had to be mainly as a correspondent and not as a poet.

However, despite Briusov’s claims to the contrary, the choice between journalism and poetry was not unproblematic. As early as October 1914 he wrote to his wife that he wanted to return to Moscow for a few months to carry out his literary plans.⁹⁷ On that occasion Briusov overcame the temptation, but when

96 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VI, p. 111 (“Sovremennye soobrazheniia”).

97 Valerii Briusov v avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh, p. 323 (letter, 7 Oct. 1914).

at the beginning of 1915 he arrived in Moscow, he was again faced with the question of what his real vocation was. At the banquet on 18 January Ivanov urged Briusov to return to his muse and serve only literature. There was something of Turgenev's famous letter from his deathbed to Tolstoi in this gesture. Ivanov did not question Briusov's involvement in the war as such, but only expressed his fear that Russia would lose one of its great poets to journalism. At that time Briusov had not yet reconsidered his choice and firmly rejected Ivanov's plea. In his reply, he made it clear that even if he considered himself only an apprentice in the field of journalism, he was not yet prepared to abandon it. War had to be favoured over art. At a moment when the future was being shaped and the destiny of nations was being decided, there was no time for poetry. With his typical maximalism Briusov added: "If there comes a moment when a choice must be made between poetry and the homeland, then the poet and poetry may perish and great Russia triumph, because when the moment of triumph comes for the homeland, then there will appear a poet worthy of the great moment."⁹⁸

In his reports Briusov consciously tried to restrain his poetic impulses. In March 1915, he was north of Warsaw, in a forest close to the front line. With fallen soldiers scattered over the terrain, Polish peasants transporting provisions to the army along the road, and the rumble of cannon in the distance, Briusov suddenly became aware of nature's own life and the murmuring of the woods:

For a few minutes silence sets in. If it were not for the sounds in the distance, one could believe that deep peace reigned over these silent coniferous woods. As always in hours of waiting and loneliness, poems start involuntarily to take shape. It appeared to be a short elegy about the winter-green woods...

But alas! My gaze, passing over the tree trunks, discerns an old, abandoned trench, covered with spruce twigs that have turned yellow. Then the silhouette of a bulky, heavy cart, crammed with Jewish refugees can be seen over there by the bend. One minute later the trample of horses can be heard, a muffled neighing: a cavalry battalion is passing by. Yet another moment later, behind it, infantry march by, swaying in even, grey lines. The officers who are riding in front on their beautiful horses are talking in a worried tone...

⁹⁸ "Chestvovanie V.Ia. Briusova", p. 39.

No, this is not the place for peaceful elegies! This is the “theatre of war”. And once again the soul is filled with images of war and battle, thoughts of the world-wide conflict, dreams of the Europe of the future.⁹⁹

As a young poet Briusov had been indifferent to nature,¹⁰⁰ but his encounter with Lake Saimaa in Finland in 1905 had completely changed his attitude, and in 1915 he could rightly claim nature to be one of the main subjects of his poetry. In his poetics, war, both as an abstract notion and a concrete reality, lay, to the contrary, outside the true field of poetry. This thought was expressed in a sonnet, “To the Memory of a Sunset” (“Na pamiat’ ob odnom zakate”). In November Briusov had visited Brzeziny close to Łódź, and during this car-trip he witnessed a sunset that made him forget the war for a moment:

(---)

All was forgotten: battles’ din and misery’s wail...
We two, in the temple of world conflagration,
composed a hymn to the beauty of the earth...

Our motorcar rushed on without aim or anywhere to go...
Oh, I remember, I remember the wonderful dream of sunset,
under the cannons’ even and muffled roar.^{*101}

Two points of time are fixed in the first line of the poem: “It was a day of war, but an immortal hour of the day” (“Byl den’ voiny, no chas bessmertnyi dnia.”).¹⁰² Despite its gigantic dimensions, the war is transient and its days are all similar. Nature, by contrast, is timeless and its beauty eternal. Like the green autumn crop of the poem, it gives perpetual promises of rebirth. Beauty does not have any goal. In an overwhelming moment of understanding, the destination of the journey and the given assignment lose their meaning. The beauty

99 Valerii Briusov, “Etiudy s natyry: I. V shtabe. II. V lesu”, *Russkie vedomosti* 12.3.1915 58.

100 Mochul’skii, *Valerii Briusov*, p. 43.

* “Zabylos’ vse: shum bitv i vopli’ stradanii.../ Vdvoem, vo khrame mirovykh pylnii,/ Slagali my gimn krasote zemnoi...// Nash motor mchal – bez tseli il’ kuda-to.../ O, pomniu, pomniu – divnyi son zakata/ Pod grokhot pushek, rovnyi i glukhoi.”

101 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 152 (“Na pamiat’ ob odnom zakate”). First publ. in *Utro* (Kharkov) 25.12.1914 2529.

102 Briusov, *Sem’ tsvetov radugi*, p. 123. In *Sobr. soch.* (vol. II, p. 152) the line is changed to “Byl den’ voiny, no chas predsmertnyi dnia.”

of nature is worldly, but it also provides a dreamlike glimpse of a heavenly sphere.

Briusov witnessed the sunset in the company of Aleksandr Fedorov, and among Fedorov's works, too, there is a poem, "At War. A Sonnet Dedicated to V. Briusov" ("Na voine. Sonet V. Briusovu"), which appears to have been inspired by the same event. Fedorov's theme is similar to that of Briusov's, but it is given a sharper formulation: "We remembered that we were sent by fate/ not to sing of war, but of your [the earth, BH] light blue peace." ("My vspomnili, chto poslany sud'boi/ Pet' ne voinu, a mir tvoi [zemlia, BH] goluboi.")¹⁰³

The poem "I have had enough of electric lights..." ("Ja ustal ot svetov elektricheskikh...") of April 1915 confirms that even the present war, in spite of its dimensions, was likely to be transformed from a unique, lofty event in world history into a tiresome, uninspiring phenomenon of everyday life. In the poem, the reality of the war, symbolized by the glaring bulletins in the newspapers, is contrasted not to nature this time, but to the creations of phantasy and the fictional world of legends and fairy tales. More than a flight from reality and a defeat of the journalist, it was in this case a question of the poet trying to define the true sphere of his art. Briusov did not explicitly express his view about the subject "poetry and war", but from a review of Maksimilian Voloshin's volume of "war poems", *Anno mundi ardentis* (1915), one can see that he rejected most of what had been written in this field as "offensive". To view the war from a cosmic point of view he dismissed as a too demanding task and advocated instead realistic poems which in a simple fashion outlined war scenes and moods.¹⁰⁴

Despite his utterances, Briusov did not entirely abandon poetry during his nine months in Poland. Just as in 1905, it turned out to be impossible to keep politics and poetry apart. Briusov's first, spontaneous, reaction to the war was not an article, but, significantly, a cycle of poems. The next "war poems" were born more by chance, more as by-products of his reports than as independent works of art. Briusov did not attach much importance to them, and while he expressed the wish to see his war sketches published as a book,¹⁰⁵ he had no such plans for the corresponding poems.

103 A. Fedorov, "Na voine: Sonet. V. Briusovu", in *Klich: Den' pechati* (Moscow, 1915), p. 150.

104 Valerii Briusov, *Sredi stikhov 1894-1924: Manifesty, stat'i, retsenzii* (Moscow, 1990), p. 476.

105 Briusov planned a volume called *Na teatre voennykh deistvii: Korrespondentsii. Pis'ma voennogo korrespondenta iz Pol'shi 1914-1915 gg.* (Valerii Briusov v avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh, p. 327), but changed his mind, presumably because of the radically altered situation in the war after the summer of 1915. Another of his abandoned literary plans was a novel, based upon his own observations (Sivovolov, p. 91).

At the outbreak of the war, Briusov had a new volume of poetry, *The Seven Colours of the Rainbow* (*Sem' tsvetov radugi*, 1916), all but ready. The collection had an overall programme: the poems were to express a broad range of feelings – from joy and exultation to sorrow and pain – but together they would give praise to different aspects of human life. The development of events added importance to the main idea of the book. For Briusov war was not the antithesis of life, and based on his world view and philosophy of history, he attempted to present it as a harmonic part of human existence and – within the formal program of the book – as one of the colours of the rainbow. Twenty-five “war poems”, approximately half of all the poems that Briusov wrote in connection with the war, form a chapter of their own in *The Seven Colours of the Rainbow*. It is unclear why Briusov chose to give the war chapter the title “Yellow”; as often his colour symbols are deeply subjective and impossible to interpret, and it is quite possible that yellow was the only colour still “free” in the summer of 1914.

The section “Yellow” reveals how few philosophical poems Briusov wrote under the influence of the war. Also remarkable is the absence of poems celebrating the native country and its allies or accusing and ridiculing their enemies, which is the most popular subgenre of “war poetry”. In spite of his broad involvement in the war, the patriotic genres and their standard vocabulary remained alien to Briusov. What we have instead is a large number of realistic “diary poems”. These poems can in many cases be read in parallel with the war correspondence, and in some cases it is even possible to point out the events which served as their inspiration.

Descriptive poems with a close relation to a particular physical reality were not as such a new phenomenon in Briusov’s writing, even if they infringed the poetics of symbolism, with its emphasis not on the objective rendering of external events and things, but on the feelings that these evoked. With nature poetry as his starting point, Briusov had already developed a skill for reproducing visual elements concretely prior to the war, even though they were subordinated to a lyrical atmosphere.¹⁰⁶ During the war these poems, this “rhymed correspondence”, as one critic ironically called them, were received coolly.¹⁰⁷ The neutral tone and the accentuated interest in details seemed to reveal that even at war Briusov remained at heart unmoved by what he saw and experienced. As another explanation of the lack of empathy and explicit authorial interventions in Briusov’s realistic “war poems”, it has been suggested that the

¹⁰⁶ Maksimov, *Briusov*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁷ M. Tumpovskaia, “‘Sem’ tsvetov radugi’ Valerii Briusova”, *Apollon* 1 (1917), p. 39.

writer consciously chose what was journalistic and commonplace in order to avoid glorifying the war.¹⁰⁸ However, this does not sound plausible, as in other connections Briusov did not display any such hesitation.

A more fruitful approach to Briusov's realistic "war poems" is to search for hidden tensions, or to see them as fragments of the whole corpus of the author's wartime writing. His stay in Vilnius during the journey to Warsaw in August 1914 gave birth to two poems, "In Vilnius" ("V Vil'no") and "More and More Often" ("Vse chashche"). The former poem is coloured by a strong expectation of the imminent encounter with the war. Town views are presented, but the attention of the persona is split. He longs to arrive at the theatre of war, from which he can hear the "song of victory" ("pobednaia pesnia"). The local Pushkin statue with its "wise smile" ("s mudroi ylubkoi") seems to give him his blessing; but in reality there is more of a Lermontov spirit in the poem. The poet stands out as an eternally homeless soul, restlessly searching for overwhelming experiences.¹⁰⁹

The essentially irresponsible and self-assertive attitude demonstrated in "In Vilnius" was never to recur. Even in "More and More Often" the tone is different. The war puts its gloomy mark upon Vilnius, with mourning women filling up the churches and a depressed mood reigning in the Jewish quarters. Briusov does not use the sorrow and the suffering as arguments against the war, but instead they are counterbalanced by the simultaneous Russian military successes. These are different aspects of the war, and Briusov is not interested in establishing a hierarchy or in moralizing. Containing both sorrow and the flush of victory, "More and More Often" fully reflected the program of the collection *The Seven Colours of the Rainbow*.¹¹⁰

Briusov's actual "front poems" are three in number: "A Battlefield" ("Pole bitvy"), "In a Trench" ("V okope") and "In the Theatre of War" ("Na teatre voiny"), later called "A Cossack Camp" ("Kazach'e stanov'e"). The background of "The Battlefield" was a visit in November 1914 to a battlefield outside Pruszkow. The corresponding report includes an evaluation of the military importance of the battle which had been fought: Russia had won a glorious victory and the fallen soldiers had given their lives for a brighter future for Europe.¹¹¹ In the poem these outspoken reflections are missing. The details are

¹⁰⁸ Bukchin, p. 146.

¹⁰⁹ Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 148 ("V Vil'no"). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl'* 10 (1914), p. 165.

¹¹⁰ Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, pp. 148-9 ("Vse chashche"). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl'* 10 (1914), pp. 165-6.

¹¹¹ V. Briusov, "Posle pobedy. Na poliakh bitv pod Varshavoi: I. Pole bitvy", *Russkie vedomosti* 15.10.1914 237.

not put together to form a whole, and Briusov does not interpret his observations. "The Battlefield" may give an impression of a detached description, but there are still a few forceful juxtapositions that give depth to the poem. The two first lines contain a subjective description: "The field is flooded, as if with gold,/ by a generous sowing of cartridges." ("Zalito pole, kak zolotom,/ Shchedrym posevom patronov.")¹¹² As the introduction of the main word, "cartridge" ("patron"), is delayed, a picture of generous prosperity is initially conjured up. But it is the promised harvest of death which is rich, and the shimmer of gold is not the attribute of richness but of waste. Further on attention is focused on the decaying body of a fallen soldier, still squeezing a letter in his hand, and on a diary lying among splintered rifle butts. The contrast in this case is one between personal life and impersonal death. Unique dreams have been relentlessly and irrevocably crushed and annihilated. It was through contrasts like these that, in some of his poems, Briusov indirectly and, indeed, in an admittedly most discreet fashion presented attitudes.

In the last stanza of "The Battlefield" the persona appears: "I stroll among the debris, at random/ experiencing past moments./ But far off a platoon of soldiers diligently/ remove the cartridge-belts." ("Brozhu mezh oblomkov, gadatel'no/ Perezhivaia bylye momenty./ A vdali, vzvod soldat, staratel'no,/ Ubraet pulemetnye lent.")¹¹³ While the subject – the lonely journalist – gazes back and tries to reconstruct what has happened, the soldiers – the united collective – are thinking about the future and working for its realization. The "at random" ("gadatel'no") of the persona is rhymed with the "assiduously" ("staratel'no") of the soldiers: his searching and groping forms a contrast to their purposeful action. The truth of the soldiers is put higher in "The Battlefield" than the truth of the isolated writer.

The soldiers also totally master their milieu in "In the Theatre of War" and "In a Trench". In the former poem Briusov reconstructs a scene that he observed during a car trip: the bivouac of Russian cossacks with lances, horses and a stew-pot on the fire. The sound of machine-guns in the background lends seriousness to the idyllic view, but otherwise "In the Theatre of War" is devoid of any philosophical weight.¹¹⁴ "In a Trench" also depicts a peaceful moment during the war. Not far from Ciechanów the poet is sitting with Siberian soldiers around a campfire drinking tea. The poem is not just an on-the-spot account, as Briusov uses the scene to convey a sense of the scale and

112 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 11, p. 150 ("Pole bitvy"). First publ. in *Klich* (1915), p. 158.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

114 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 11, pp. 153-4 ("Na teatre voyny" / "Kazach'e stanov'e"). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 27.9.1915 15113.

the complexity of events: “Invisibly the fates of all of Europe/ are interwoven with the fate of men from the Urals (...).” (“Nezrimo sud’by vsei Evropy/ S sud’boi ural’tsev spleteny”).¹¹⁵ Even these goodhearted, bearded men from Northern Russia are participating in the formation of the future Europe. Even they dream of the “collapse of empires” and “happiness for everyone”. The sense of manipulation is strong, as these fictional soldiers do not live their own lives, but are obviously in the service of the author, a device which was otherwise carefully avoided by Briusov.

In his poems as well as in his reports, Briusov rarely commented upon the devastation and death brought about by the war. There is, however, a poem, “The Feast of War” (“Pirshestvo Voiny”), that exclusively concentrates on the tragic side of events:

War passed by here, crying out
with the steel throats of cannon,
smashing houses in her hand
like a bunch of crunchy crackers.

There, behind the damp copse,
the guests of War were sitting;
she entertained them with the glitter
of shrapnel sent skyward.

She invited her sister, Death: “Join us,”
she told her, “as the eldest at our feast!”
Sumptuous viands were served,
such as never had been seen in the world.

There was wine, both intoxicating and sweet,
that a drinking companion, Battle, praised.
The plentiful scraps of the feast
are now hidden by mugwort.

Day and night the feast continued;
all, crimson from home-brew, was silent around...
But which of the guests was the hoodlum
who broke the windowpanes in the distance?

¹¹⁵ Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 153 (“V okope”). First publ. in *Otechestvo* 2 (1915), p. 5.

Who was the inappropriately coarse wag
 that set fire to the halls as it ended?
 And now only chimneys are standing,
 scorched chimneys along the road.*¹¹⁶

The critic M. Tumpovskaia dismissed the attempt to catch the pathos of the war with the help of the allegorical form as a total failure.¹¹⁷ A more reasonable evaluation is to see “The Feast of War” as the most powerful of Briusov’s early “war poems”. By contrast with the few philosophical poems, with their stereotyped vocabulary and rhetorical devices, and with the poems from the front, with their cautious tone, here one can find genuine empathy with the tragedy of the war. The poem was written on the road between Brzeziny and Warsaw on 4/17 December 1914 and is based on actual observations, but in order to give a comprehensive picture Briusov has abstracted and personified the war. Destruction has been deprived of any positive value, as it does not give any promise of new life. The war treats its guests – Death is the guest of honour, and Briusov establishes a close relation between war and death by dubbing them sisters – to a merry feast, but the traces that the party leaves behind are terrifying. The war is an independent being, capricious and unreliable, and, as Briusov had already cautiously suggested in “The Last War”, its results are ultimately unpredictable. In “The Feast of War” there is also a comment on Tiutchev’s, and Briusov’s own initial delight at having the possibility to attend the feast of the gods. The first intoxicating feeling has gone and it is no longer a blessed privilege but more of a curse to be present when history is being shaped. “The Feast of War” does not signify a total break with earlier positions, but it is the first evidence of a growing doubt about the positive outcome of the war.

Fedor Sologub also viewed the war as an historical event, bound to have far-reaching consequences, not only on the fate of nations, but also on man’s

* “Voina zdes’ proshla, prokrichala/ Stal’nymi glotkami pushek,/ V ruke doma izlomala,/ Kak viazku khrustnuvshikh sushek.// Vot tam, za syrym pereleskom,/ Gosti Voiny sideli,/ Ona zabavliala ikh bleskom/ Puskaemykh k nebu shrapneli.// Smert’-sestru priglasila: ‘Uchastvui, –/ Ei skazala, – kak starshaia, v pire!’/ Podavalis’ roskoshnye iastva,/ Kakikh i ne videli v mire.// Byli vina i khmel’ny i sladki,/ Ikh pokhvalival Boi-sobutyl’nik./ Obil’nye pira ostatki/ Skryvaet teper’ chernobyl’nik.// Den’ i noch’ prodolzhasia prazdnik,/ Vkrug, ot bragi bagrianoi, vsë smoklo.../ Tol’ko kto zh iz gostei, bezobraznik,/ Perebil v dal’nikh oknakh stekla?// Kto, shutnik neumestno grubyi,/ Podpalil pod konets chertogi?/ I teper’ torchat tol’ko truby/ Obgorelye, – vdol’ dorogi.”

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2 (“Pirshestvo voiny”). First publ. in *Klich* (1915), p. 46.

¹¹⁷ Tumpovskaia, p. 40.

inner life. As the theme of war totally dominated his writings during the period 1914-1917, it is astonishing to see how little interest he actually took in life at the front. Sologub confined himself to the information that could be obtained through the press and through acquaintances, and it is in fact only during the first six months of the war that any curiosity about the experiences of the soldiers is evident.

"The Sentry" ("Chasovoi"), dated 12 September 1914, is the first of around ten dramatic monologues in which the persona is a soldier in the forefront of battle.¹¹⁸ According to Sologub's wife, the psychological content of these poems was taken straight from real life. As his informant Sologub was said to have had among others a writer who returned from the war at the end of 1914.¹¹⁹ One should, however, be careful not to exaggerate Sologub's dependence upon eye-witnesses in such cases. The first dramatic monologues were composed in September 1914, when the only available source of information was the press. Furthermore, in several cases Sologub openly uses the dramatic monologue to give his highly subjective, ideologically coloured interpretation of the war.

The settings of Sologub's "front poems" are swamps and fields, shrouded in drizzle, fog and darkness. Notable is the attention that is given in two poems, "The Fever of the Trenches" ("Likhoradka okopov")¹²⁰ and "Rain and Sleep" ("Dozhd' i son"), to the depressing inactivity and the unendurable conditions in the trenches. With the help of parallel lines and chiasmus Sologub creates in the first stanza of "Rain and Sleep" a picture of the balance of power which led to deadlock in the war. By turning the enemy into a mirror image of their own side, the shared fate of the soldiers is emphasized:

We are mighty and stubborn;
the enemy is obstinate and mighty.
Just like him, we dig pits
in rain that falls from gray clouds.*¹²¹

There are no battle descriptions to be found in Sologub's dramatic monologues, even though the heroes of the poems are shown in dangerous situ-

118 Sologub, *Voina*, p. 30 ("Chasovoi"). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 27.10.1914 14458.

119 Vladimir Berenshtam, "Voina i poety: Pis'mo iz Petrograda", *Russkie vedomosti* 1.1.1915 1. See also Fedor Sologub, "Vybor orientatsii", *Otechestvo* 6 (1914), p. 104.

120 Sologub, *Voina*, p. 33 ("Likhoradka okopov"). First publ. in *Den'* 1.11.1914 297.

* "My moguchi i upriamy,/ Vrag uporen i moguch./ Kak i on, kopaem iamy/ Pod dozhdem iz serykh tuch."

121 *Ibid.*, p. 34 ("Dozhd' i son"). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 23.11.1914 14512.

ations. They are night sentries ("Chasovoi"), soldiers sent on reconnaissance ("Nochnaia vstrecha",¹²² "Vrazhii strazh"¹²³) and orderlies who take messages to other units ("Nochnoi prikaz"¹²⁴). It is mainly the psychological processes that Sologub is interested in. Fear and anxiety are dispelled as the soldiers concentrate on their tasks, and the peacetime civilian is turned into a cold-blooded warrior. Here the emphasis, just as in Sologub's wartime journalism, is on transfiguration.

A major problem for Sologub was that his poetic language was not adequate for describing the experience of the soldiers. "The simplicity, severity, the perfection of form" that Aleksandr Blok had seen as the distinctive features of Sologub's poetry¹²⁵ proved to be totally unsuitable for this task. Only in the poem "Delirium in the Trenches" ("Bred v okopakh") can one find an attempt at creative experimentation. In order to illustrate how the soldiers' sense of reality is distorted when they are gassed by the enemy, Sologub uses two narrative voices, a complicated rhyming scheme and enjambement, and breaks down the ordinary stanza form.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the lack of images and the simple syntax still give an overall impression of conventional poetry. When Sologub tries to depict the thoughts of a soldier at the hour of death, in the poem "In the Fire" ("V ogne") an acute conflict emerges between the material and the structure. No attempt is made at stream of consciousness, but the thoughts and feelings of the persona are governed by a high-flown patriotism until the very end. The second before he is hit by a grenade the soldier thinks, or rather rhymes: "I fight obstinately and bravely, / I do not fear the enemy – / for a just cause, / for Russia!" ("Srazhaius' uporno i smelo, / Vraga ne boius' – / Za pravoe delo, / Za Rus'!")¹²⁷ The soldier's satisfaction at his own achievement extends to the moment when he receives his heavenly reward. In other dramatic monologues ("Chasovoi", "Vrazhii strazh"), too, the persona displays a similarly disturbing self-righteousness. Here it is clearly more a question of authorial intrusion than of "trench realism".

At the end of December 1914, a group of poets, including Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandel'shtam and Igor' Severianin, met at Sologub's and Chebotarevskaja's home in Petrograd. During the evening many poems were recited. The host refused to read anything but "war poems", and he also pro-

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 27 ("Nochnaia vstrecha").

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 31 ("Vrazhii strazh").

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29 ("Nochnoi prikaz"). First publ. in *Otechestvo* 3 (1914).

¹²⁵ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. v, p. 285.

¹²⁶ Sologub, *Voina*, p. 35 ("Bred v okopakh").

¹²⁷ Sologub, *Voina*, p. 36 ("V ogne").

posed a toast to the “absent heroes” who were fighting for their motherland.¹²⁸ It might be said that for Sologub the soldiers remained forever the “absent heroes” whose life he never got to know. Having chosen to view the war from a collective-national and world-historical point of view, he paid no attention to individual experiences. Even the fictional soldiers of his dramatic monologues are completely in the service of their master. Their function is to witness that they had passed the test. They have overcome fear of death and are now wholeheartedly fulfilling their patriotic duty. Thus they, too, became evidence of the renewing force of war.

Total ignorance of military life did not prevent Konstantin Bal'mont and Viacheslav Ivanov from writing one poem each about life at the front. What unites Bal'mont's “The Snowstorm” (“Zadymka” /Polish/, 1915)¹²⁹ and Ivanov's “Above the Trenches” (“Nad okopami”, 1916)¹³⁰ is that neither of them touches upon the causes and aims of the war, but instead they focus on one single, tense situation on the front line. In Bal'mont's poem it is a bayonet charge under cover of darkness and a snow storm, and in Ivanov's “Above the Trenches” the dangerous position of a sentry in the twilight zone, shrouded in fog.

Bal'mont's “The Snowstorm” is given the form of a stylized, rhymed inner monologue. The persona, a soldier, is at places interchanged with a “we”, creating an image of a closely united collective of soldiers. It is a voice full of self-confidence, relying in the battle on a oneness with nature and an invincibility. Bal'mont did not attempt to penetrate the soldier's psychology, but aimed instead at building up a belief in the inner strength of the Russian soldier and, consequently, in the military impetus of the Russian army. An atmosphere of uncertainty reigns in Ivanov's “Above the Trenches”. Like the black wings of a crow (in Bal'mont's “The Snowstorm”, too, the crow is employed as a folkloric bad omen), dusk is on the side of the enemy, providing him shelter. The poet's message to the sentry is to show an even greater vigilance.

Neither “The Snowstorm” nor “Above the Trenches” are among the best “war poems” of the two poets. They are dramatic, but not tragic, and the psychological approach is not convincing. While for soldier-futurists like Sergei Tretiakov, Konstantin Bol'shakov, Vadim Shershenevich and Sergei Bobrov it was natural to desert traditional poetic forms and renew the language of patriotic poetry, in order to do justice to the essence of modern war, the symbolists lacked not only close contact with the war, but also a poetic language fit to render either the outer turmoil of the battles, or complicated psychological processes.

¹²⁸ Berenshtam, “Voina i poety”.

¹²⁹ K. Bal'mont, “Zadymka”, *Russkoe slovo* 1.1.1915 1.

¹³⁰ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 38 (“Nad okopami”). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 10.4.1916 83.

The Burning Questions

In the massive stream of information coming from the war, a few dramatic issues and events stood out. In Russia, public attention in 1914 was focused on the feats of Cossack cavalryman Koz'ma Kriuchkov, the death of the aviator Nikolai Nesterov, the successful Russian military operations in Galicia, the violent German conquest of the Polish town of Kalisz, Belgian resistance to the German occupation and the German bombardment of Reims cathedral in France. In their presentation, these issues strikingly illustrated the glorious and honourable behaviour of the Russians and their allies and the depths of the enemy's barbarity.

The same motives which were treated in the press also appeared in literature, often in a more simplified or exaggerated form, so as clearly to bring out the inherent moral. Having no personal contact with war's realities, Russian writers were restricted to the same sources as their public or were compelled to use their imagination. The borderline between genuine empathy and callous commercialization of human tragedies and between art and mass-produced literature was often blurred. The term "war literature" soon acquired strongly negative connotations in criticism, because very little of deeper human concern and convincing artistic value was produced in the field. This distaste for the defiling of the theme of war was expressed by Zinaida Gippius when she asked in a poem to be spared from hearing anything more about Belgium and Poland. Doubting the relevance or power of the word, she advocated in fact silence as the only decent reaction in face of all sorrow and suffering.¹³¹ On the other hand not even Gippius could refrain from speaking out on behalf of the victims of the war, even if she consistently shied from using big words. Ultimately, the symbolists, too, took the case of the Belgian and Polish nations to their hearts. A third disturbing issue was the outbreak of anti-Semitism in Poland and Russia. For many writers, this was a question of defending basic human rights and supporting the oppressed, but, as it turned out, it was also possible to interpret these topics in the light of broader, even eschatological schemes.

The Tragedy of Occupied Belgium

On the night of 22 July (4 August) 1914, German troops crossed the Belgian border. The German demand for free transit had been rejected, but an effective

131 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 140 ("O Pol'she"). First publ. without title in *Prianiak sirotevshim detiam: Sbornik v pol'zu ubezhishcha obshchestva Detskaia pomoshch'* (Petrograd, 1916), p. 29.

military attack on France could not be undertaken without violating Belgium's neutrality. Within three weeks a large part of the country, including Liège and Brussels, was under German control. The Belgian army retreated to Antwerp, but the city fortress surrendered after a short siege on 27 September (10 October).

The defence of Belgium was not a brilliant military exploit, but the events nevertheless came to play a tremendous role in the mobilization of sentiment among the Allied Powers and in neutral countries. The German invasion was emblematic of a strong military nation's ruthless attack on a small, peaceful neighbour, testifying to contempt for both international agreements and moral laws. Belgian resistance led to several catastrophes, among them the devastation of the old university town of Leuven. There were reports of executions of civilians without investigation or trial and the burning down of villages. Fighting for supremacy, the German army appeared to feel no respect for human life or cultural monuments. The refusal to accept the German ultimatum and the resistance of King Albert, the Belgian army and the nation as a whole were, on the contrary, interpreted as inspired demonstrations of courage and a love for freedom and the native land.

In Russia, the news from Belgium stirred strong feelings, even if it came from a faraway country that few had any personal connection with. For a few months, the Belgian theme dominated literature, as writers of all schools employed it in poems, short stories and plays in order to stir anti-German sentiments and praise Belgian patriotism. The first to comment on the Belgian tragedy was the symbolist Fedor Sologub. On the same day as the Russian press carried the news about the German attack, he wrote the poem "The Belgian" ("Bel'giets").¹³² The wish to give the Belgian people moral support was partly spoiled by a thoughtless choice of persona. The hero of the dramatic monologue is a Belgian ivory tradesman from Congo. Having no principled objections to colonialism, Sologub sees his main character as a representative of ordinary, peace-loving Belgian citizens. As a result, there emerged an unintentional conflict between the man's profession and his indignant protests against the German "contempt for borders". On the other hand, the colonialist's readiness to defend his native country is firm, if rather declamatory, and in this sense he could well serve as a model for later fictional Belgians in Russian literature.

Another early treatment of the Belgian theme is Valerii Briusov's "To the Flemish" ("Flamandtsam"), a poem written a few days after the capitulation

¹³² Sologub, *Voina*, p. 19 ("Bel'giets"). First publ. in *Den'* 28.8.1914.

of Liège.¹³³ The poet befittingly consoles the defeated with the thought that strength does not lie in arms but in patriotism. His examples of valour are taken from regional military history and give the poem local colour and substance, but they are also revealing for Briusov's inclination to view the war through the prism of history. The erudite Briusov made a surprising mistake in his poem, as "Flemish" apparently stand for the Belgian people as a whole. In reality, the Flemish had not even been touched by the war at this point. Briusov was perhaps misled by his admiration for Emile Verhaeren – a name also mentioned in "To the Flemish" – as this French-speaking Flemish writer was for him almost synonymous with Belgian literature. Prior to the war, Briusov had translated Verhaeren's poetry, and the news from Belgium made him relevant again for Briusov.¹³⁴ Verhaeren's collection of wartime articles, *La Belgique sanglante* (1915, transl. *Okrovavlennaia Bel'giia*, 1916), marked by a fierce hatred towards the Germans, was reviewed by Briusov in a very positive spirit.¹³⁵ In his own articles, Briusov was more detached than his Belgian colleague, but he definitely shared some of Verhaeren's feelings. The German assault on Belgium was a "crime" that could not be forgiven¹³⁶ and the rejection of German peace initiatives was a praiseworthy example of courage and firmness of principle.¹³⁷

On 21 October 1914, the Petrograd newspaper *Den'* contained a special Belgian section. Among the contributors were three symbolists, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, Aleksandr Blok and Fedor Sologub. Merezhkovskii's article "The Swankiller" ("Ubiitsa lebedei") had no specific Belgian connection, but Blok's poem "Antwerp" ("Antverpen") was highly topical, written only a week after the capitulation of the town. The news stirred memories of Blok's visit to Belgium in 1911 and made him abandon his policy of not writing occasional poems. In the first stanza, he alludes to his own encounter with Antwerp:

Even though it was long ago,
Antwerp! – across a sea of blood
you remain so memorable to me...

133 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 156 ("Flamandtsam"). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl'* 8-9 (1914), pp. 243-4.

134 In the autumn of 1914 Briusov published an article about Verhaeren, "K portretu Emilia Verkharna", *Izvestiia Moskovskogo literaturno-khudozhestvennogo krughka* 7 (1914), p. 14.

135 Valerii Briusov, "Okrovavlennaia Bel'giia: 'Okrovavlennaia Bel'giia' E. Verkharna", *Russkie vedomosti* 5.7.1915 154.

136 Valerii Briusov, "Nemetskie opravdaniia", *Russkie vedomosti* 4.1.1915 3.

137 Valerii Briusov, "Stradanie i velichie Bel'gii: I", *Russkie vedomosti* 11.1.1915 8.

The river mist spreads from upstream
on the Escaut, wide as the Neva.

And over the calm river,
in mist that is warm and deep
like the gaze of a young Flemish woman,
there are countless masts, shipyards, docks,
and it smells of tackle and tar.

Troubling the water's smooth surface
in a wide dilation of smoke,
a heavy two-masted steamer
is ready now to cast anchor:
it is headed for the Congo...

You, though, peer into a haze of centuries
in the quiet municipal museum:
there Quentin Massys reigns;
there the folds of Salome's dress
have flowers of gold inwoven...

But it's all a sham, it's all a fraud:
look up... in a patch of blue sky
that is glimpsed through the mist
you spy an omen of the storm –
the circling of an aeroplane.*¹³⁸

* "Pust' eto vremia daleko,/ Antverpen! – I za morem krovi/ Ty pamiaten mne gluboko.../ Rechnoi tuman polzet s verkhovii/ Shirokoi, kak Neva, Esko.// I nad spokoinoiu rekoi/ V tumane teplom i glubokom,/ Kak vzor flamandki molodoi,/ Net scheta machtam, verfiyam, dokam,/ I pakhnet snast'iu i smoloi.// Trevozha vodianuiu glad',/ V shiroko steliushchemsia dyme/ Uzh iakoria gotov otdat'/ Tiazhelyi dvukhmachtovyi stimer:/ Emu na Kongo kurs derzhat'...// A ty – vo mglu vekov gliadis'/ V spokoinom gorodskom muzee:/ Tam tsarstvuet Kventin Massis;/ Tam v skladki plat'ia Salomei/ Tsvety iz zoloto vplelis'...// No vse – prytvorstvo, vse – obman:/ Vzgliani naverkh... V klochke lazuri,/ Mel'kaiushchem cherez tuman,/ Uvidish' ty predvest'e buri –/ Kruzhashchiisia aeroplan." 138 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 153 ("Antverpen"). First publ. in *Den'* 21.10.1914 286. Also in *Bel'giiskii sbornik* (Petrograd, 1915), pp. 11-2 and *Kniga korol'ia Al'berta* (Moscow, 1915), pp. 21-2.

Explicitly based on the author's own impressions, "Antwerp" was unique among the Russian poems on Belgium. In spite of his symbolist aesthetics, Blok, like Briusov, knew how to describe the settings of his poems vividly. Antwerp becomes a town with individual features, as Blok stresses its connection with trade and art. As a result, the sorrow at the thought of the town's fate rings true. By comparing the Escaut River to the Neva River, Blok makes Antwerp more identifiable to the Russian reader. Contrary to most contemporary writers, Blok realized that understatement makes a stronger impression than an accumulation of horrors. The war is only faintly suggested through the menacing shape of an aeroplane circling above the peaceful town. A detail like this indicates how reluctant Blok was to go beyond his own experiences.

As an expression of compassion for a war-torn country, Blok's "Antwerp", with its theme of the "crushed idyll", was nonetheless excessively vague. Unconcerned by Belgian patriotism, Blok preferred to keep the poem on a purely individual plane. The poem had also some aesthetic flaws, mainly on its metaphorical level. The symbol of war, the storm, and the hyperbolic metaphor "a sea of blood" were hackneyed images, and even clashed with the otherwise restrained tone of the poem. Blok wrote his poem on request¹³⁹ and in other contexts he could talk about "toy countries" like Belgium in a condescending tone,¹⁴⁰ but "Antverpen" is nevertheless of importance as one of its author's few explicit poetic comments on the World War.¹⁴¹

Belgium's struggle for freedom also became the focus of an international campaign which culminated in the publication of *King Albert's Book* in 1915. The same year a Russian translation, *Kniga korolia Al'berta*, with an enlarged Russian section appeared. In the long list of famous European and American contributors, only two Russian writers were originally to be found, Aleksandr Kuprin and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii.¹⁴² The choice of Kuprin seems arbitrary,

139 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, pp. 241-2.

140 Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniakh sovremennikov v dvukh tomakh, vol. I (Moscow, 1980), p. 392 (V. Piast, "Vospominaniia o Bloke").

141 For an analysis of Blok's "Antwerp", see N.Iu. Griakalova, "Russkie pisateli – geroicheskoi Bel'gii: Spetsial'nyi vypusk gazety 'Den'", in *Politika i poetika: Russkaia literatura v istoriko-kul'turnom kontekste Pervoi mirovoi voiny. Publikatsiia, issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow, 2014), pp. 266-79.

142 Leonid Andreev, the Russian writer who had most visibly supported Belgium, was also supposed to participate in *King Albert's Book* (see "Kniga korolia Al'berta", *Otechestvo* 6 /1914/, p. 116), but his contribution, "O Bel'gii", apparently arrived too late. In *Kniga korolia Al'berta* (Moscow, 1915), which has a larger Russian section than the original, Andreev's text is included.

while Merezhkovskii was a writer of international fame. To its content and tone, Merezhkovskii's short statement "To the Belgian People" ("Bel'giiskomu narodu") did not differ much from those of the other writers: Belgium's admirable spiritual feat had turned its cause into a universal concern and would be rewarded on the day of victory.¹⁴³

Belief in the coming liberation and rebirth of the Belgian nation was in itself a major theme in the literature on Belgium. An example of this, simultaneously offering the most peculiar reason for trust in the future, could be found in the abovementioned Belgian issue of *Den'*, namely Fedor Sologub's poem "Comfort to Belgium" ("Uteshenie Bel'gii").¹⁴⁴ Sologub called attention to the prediction of a French clairvoyante that Russian armies would conquer Berlin before the spring of 1915 and thereby halt the war. In his wish to infuse the readers with a hope and belief that would provide an impetus for action, Sologub was even prepared to utilize popular culture. The result caused, however, more bewilderment and ridicule than genuine inspiration.

An apocalyptic interpretation of events in Belgium was offered by Merezhkovskii and Gippius. For Merezhkovskii, Belgium was the modern "Holy Land", an innocent nation nailed to the cross to suffer for the whole of mankind in order to bring about ultimate salvation.¹⁴⁵ The symbol of Golgotha also appears in Gippius' poem "Three Crosses" ("Tri kresta", 1914). The war is a crucifixion and the coming peace a resurrection of the human spirit. Gippius ended her poem by consoling, "And we believe that it will be so!" ("I veruem, – da budet!"), addressing herself to both the Belgians and to humankind in general.¹⁴⁶ Merezhkovskii's and Gippius' choice of symbols not only transmitted their belief in a just outcome of the war. It also implied that the events had a higher, religious significance and were necessary not only for the spiritual growth of the individuals and nations involved, but also for the fulfillment of a divine plan. While Christian symbols of suffering and salvation were commonly used in "war literature", they were fundamental to some of the symbolists, who in turn applied them to Belgium, Poland, Russia, and, ultimately, the whole of mankind.

143 D. Merezhkovskii, "Bel'giiskomu narodu", in *Kniga korol'ia Al'berta*, pp. 16-7. First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 30.10.1914 14464 and *Rech'* 30.10.1914 293.

144 Sologub, *Voina*, pp. 20-1 ("Uteshenie Bel'gii"). First publ. in *Den'* 21.10.1914 286. Also in *Kniga korol'ia Al'berta*, pp. 20-1.

145 *Kniga korol'ia Al'berta*, pp. 16-7.

146 Zinaida Gippius, "Tri kresta", in *Kniga korol'ia Al'berta*, p. 24. First publ. in *Den'* 21.10.1914 286.

The Tragedy of Divided Poland

At the outbreak of the First World War Poland was divided between Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Even if a strong historical consciousness and national culture united the Poles across the borders, their future prospects were dim. None of the three Great Powers had shown much concern for Polish interests, and the evidence of Germanization or Russianization left no doubts concerning the dangers of German and Russian superiority. In Austria-Hungary there were talks in 1914 about Poland becoming the third ruling nation in the empire, but Galicia, the Austrian part of Poland, was, on the other hand, the most economically neglected of Polish territories. The war added to the tragedy, as the battle line divided the Polish people and created situations where Poles were fighting in different armies.¹⁴⁷

In Russian literature, the Polish question received a prominent place since a Slavonic nation was involved. Furthermore, it was on Polish territory that the Russian armies were fighting. The news about German brutality in occupied areas, and the sympathy that Russian troops reportedly received from the local population seemed to affirm the importance of the Russian presence. If the tsarist regime looked on the Poles with distrust, a feeling of guilt was discernible behind many liberal Russian comments on the Polish question. This response was fostered both by an awareness of the Russian role in the three partitions of Poland, the ruthless suppressions of the Polish uprisings, the prevailing restrictions concerning local government and educational institutions, and personal experiences of not being welcome in pre-war Poland. The war against a common enemy offered a possibility to atone for past sins and establish a new friendly relationship with the Polish people. This was not merely a Russian wish, but it was also shared in certain political and cultural circles in Warsaw.¹⁴⁸

The basis for the establishment of new relations between Russia and Poland was the manifesto, issued by the Supreme Commander in Chief, the Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, on 1/14 August 1914. The manifesto indicated hope for the restoration of Poland's historical borders, but while the thought of independence was already firmly rooted among the Poles, the manifesto outlined a common future for Poland and Russia: "May it reunite into one whole under the sceptre of the Russian tsar. Under this sceptre Poland will revive, free in its religion, language, government."¹⁴⁹ The promise about more freedom was

¹⁴⁷ On the situation of Poland in 1914, see *The History of Poland since 1863* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 109-15.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁴⁹ "Vozzvanie Verkhovnogo Glavnokomanduiushchego", *Niva* 33 (1914), p. 641.

vague, and Russian policy prior to 1914 in the Kingdom of Poland, or the Vistula region, as the territory was officially called, did not inspire confidence. Another weakness was that the manifesto was not signed by the tsar, the head of the Russian state, but by the Grand Duke, who had no authority in the Polish question.¹⁵⁰ The manifesto was, nevertheless, favourably received by Polish circles and especially among the liberal Russian intelligentsia. The promises to reunite the Polish people and to respect its basic rights, and the possibility of a better relationship between the two nations were appealing.

For divergent reasons, nearly all the Russian symbolists saw the Polish question as significant. Poland became a kind of testing-ground not only for political and religious views, but also for the Russian self-image and future prospects. The only one to come into contact with Polish everyday reality was Valerii Briusov, who even before his departure for Warsaw had formulated his opinion on the issue. The poem "To Poland" ("Pol'she"), significantly, is dated 1 August, the day of the Russian manifesto. The epigraph was taken from Fedor Tiutchev's curious poem "On the Conquest of Warsaw" ("Na vziatie Varshavy", 1831).¹⁵¹ Shortly after Russian troops had crushed the Polish uprising of 1830, Tiutchev eloquently defended Russian policy in his poem as a necessary measure for the preservation of the empire and the unity of the Slavonic people under the Russian banner. After this overt display of Russian chauvinism, Tiutchev surprisingly predicted that a mutual freedom would germinate from the ashes of Poland. By choosing this concluding stanza as his motto, Briusov implicitly maintained that the cherished historical moment now had arrived.

The Soviet critic G. Derbenev, who wished to present Briusov as an oppositional voice in tsarist Russia, claims that contrary to the official manifesto, Briusov spoke up about the historical conflicts that poisoned the relationship between the Poles and the Russians.¹⁵² In reality, no such conflict exists between the poem and the manifesto, which Briusov in another context labelled "historical" and even "generous".¹⁵³ A contemporary critic even went to the length of calling Briusov's poem a rhymed version of the Russian manifesto.¹⁵⁴ The main point of both texts is that even if the Kingdom of Poland were to regain most of its historical territory, it had to remain united with Russia. In Briusov's "To Poland", Poland is likened to Lazarus who awoke from the dead,

¹⁵⁰ *The History of Poland since 1863*, p. 110.

¹⁵¹ Tiutchev, pp. 119–20 ("Na vziatie Varshavy" / "Kak doch' rodnuui na zaklan'e...").

¹⁵² Derbenev, p. 183.

¹⁵³ Valerii Briusov, "Teni: Pis'mo iz Varshavy", *Russkie vedomosti* 2.9.1914 201.

¹⁵⁴ M. Nevedomskii, "Chto stalos' s nashei literaturoi? O poezii i proze nashikh dnei", *Sovremennik* 5 (1915), p. 267.

but the role of Christ is assigned to Russia. The appeal, “Lazarus, rise!”, is actually a metaphor for the Russian manifesto. In the last stanza, “Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła” and “Bozhe tsaria khрани”, the two national anthems, merge in a fraternal duet.¹⁵⁵

The most radical part of Briusov’s “To Poland” is the epigraph with Tiutchev’s words about a future shared freedom. What exactly Briusov meant by Russian freedom remains unclear, but Polish freedom in the manifesto was restricted to religion, language and local government. Such promises were easily forgotten, Briusov would soon see. In spite of the fact that there were over half a million Polish soldiers in the Russian army, there were no Catholic army chaplains at the front. Nor was the Polish language favoured by local Russian authorities. When the Red Cross organized a charity event in Warsaw, all texts were only in Russian. Briusov wanted to see incidents like these as occasional “sad misunderstandings”, but reality would prove him to be wrong.¹⁵⁶

In spite of its moderate tone, “To Poland” functioned as an excellent “letter of introduction” for Briusov in Warsaw. Educated Poles were divided on the question of independence, and the benevolent attitude of a famous Russian writer was by all means most welcome. Polish translations of “To Poland” had already been published before Briusov’s arrival.¹⁵⁷ Briusov was received cordially by Polish intellectuals. Contrary to its tradition, the local union of writers and journalists welcomed a Russian writer onto its premises.¹⁵⁸ At a banquet on 23 August (6 September) in Briusov’s honour, “To Poland” was recited in Polish and the poet was thanked for his contribution to the common cause. The Polish poets Edward Słōński and Leo Belmont wrote complimentary poems to Briusov, stressing his importance as a link between the two nations.¹⁵⁹ As a final poetic comment on the Polish question and a tribute to his Polish friends, Briusov wrote the poem “Poland Lives” (“Pol’sha est”).¹⁶⁰ The ultimate essence of a nation’s vitality is its culture, was Briusov’s consoling message on the eve of the German offensive of 1915.

The importance of Briusov’s work was also acknowledged in Moscow. At a Polish evening, arranged by the Moscow Literature and Art Circle on 13 January

155 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 147 (“Pol’she”). First publ. in *Russkie vedomosti* 8.8.1914 181.

156 Briusov, “Teni”.

157 Derbenev, p. 183.

158 *Ibid.*; Bukchin, p. 143.

159 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 611 (comm. to “Pol’sha est”); “V Literaturno-khudozhestvennom kruzhke”, *Russkie vedomosti* 25.8.1914 170; “Iubilei, bankety, privetstviu i pr.”

160 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, pp. 346-7 (“Pol’sha est”).

1915, Briusov read his own poems and translations of Polish poetry, and at the banquet, five days later, Pavel Miliukov thanked him for helping the Duma members to orient themselves on the Polish question.¹⁶¹ That these were not just empty words can be seen from the fact that Briusov's "To Poland" was included in a memorandum on Poland which was compiled in 1916 for internal use on the order of Nicholas II.¹⁶² Unfortunately, from a Russian point of view, the Polish question had by then become completely theoretical, a fact which also points to the limitations of Briusov's treatment of the theme.

Aleksandr Blok had a more sober view of Russo-Polish relations. He had in principle agreed to contribute to a Polish anthology that Sergei Gorodetskii and Aleksei Remizov were to edit in 1915,¹⁶³ but for unknown reasons this volume did not materialize. It is possible that Blok had intended to submit "Over Warsaw" ("Nad Varshavoi"), a poem that was eventually published in the Christmas issue of *Birzhevye vedomosti* in 1915. "Over Warsaw" is an extract from "Retribution" ("Vozmezdie"), the long autobiographical poem that Blok was working on during the war. Poland enters "Retribution", as the hero – Blok's alter ego – travels to Warsaw to see his father. Blok presumably deliberately refrained from telling the readers of *Birzhevye vedomosti* that "Over Warsaw" was part of a larger work and that it in fact dealt with the past. A closer look at the text reveals another significant but previously unnoticed fact. The meaning of the poem was actually reversed in *Birzhevye vedomosti* through the addition of a single letter in the concluding stanza:

Warsaw, wasn't it you, also,
the capital of the haughty Poles,
that a crowd of Prussian army louts
forced to slumber? *¹⁶⁴

It can now probably never be established who changed the "Russian" ("russkii") of the manuscript¹⁶⁵ to "Prussian" ("prusskii") in the newspaper version. If Blok had intended to brand Russian oppressors and not contemporary German occupiers, it was indeed a daring step on his part to offer his

¹⁶¹ "Tubilei, bankety, privetstviia i pr."

¹⁶² Derbenev, p. 183.

¹⁶³ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 264.

* "Ne takzhe l' i tebia, Varshava, / Stolitsa gordykh poliakov, / Dremat' prinudila orava / Voennykh prusskikh poshliakov."

¹⁶⁴ Aleksandr Blok, "Nad Varshavoi", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 25.12.1915 15290.

¹⁶⁵ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, pp. 340, 614.

poem as reading for Christmas, a time of forgiveness and reconciliation. Even if there was a will among the Russian intelligentsia to make up for the wrongs of the past, readiness for national self-criticism had certainly not reached the level that Blok suggested. As a result of censorship or, perhaps, Blok's second thoughts, "Over Warsaw" did not stand out among the many Russian comments on the Polish question.

In his poem "To Poland" Valerii Briusov referred to Tiutchev's "On the Conquest of Warsaw" but refrained from commenting on the Slavophile concept that forms the basis of this poem. The common destiny of the two people, bound together by blood and a claimed historical mission, was instead the focus of interest for Konstantin Bal'mont, Fedor Sologub, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii and Viacheslav Ivanov. Of these, Bal'mont had claimed to be a devotee of Polish culture for many years.¹⁶⁶ During the war, he dealt with the Polish theme in poems, articles, translations and public readings. While still in France, he wrote two important literary comments on the Polish question, "A Blood Feast" ("Prazdnik krovi") and "The Coat of Arms of the Secret Moon" ("Gerb zataennogo Mesiatsa"). Both poems not only amply demonstrated the writer's Polish sympathies, but also his firm conviction that there could be no future for a Poland politically and spiritually isolated from Russia.

The sonnet "A Blood Feast" is remarkable in that it is the only attempt by Bal'mont to exploit his acknowledged technical literary brilliance in order to depict the war:

The Polish and the Russian land,
the Russian and the Polish domain.
I see you, native visions:
there the wind blows, whipping the snow.

Forests, marshes, dales and fields.
The snowstorm whistles. The fall of grenades burbles.
Shrapnel squeals. There is humming and buzzing.
The festival of death growls there, extending its hour.

¹⁶⁶ Several essays on Polish folklore in Bal'mont's *Morskoe svechenie* (St. Petersburg, [1910]) bear witness to the poet's interest in Poland. Blok seems to have been aware of Bal'mont's Polish sympathies, as he in 1912 promised to give a talk on the subject "Bal'mont and the Polish soul". The occasion was cancelled, and Blok never read or published his paper. (*Zapiski Neofilologicheskogo obshchestva pri Imperatorskom S.-Peterburgskom Universitete*, vol. VII /Petrograd, 1914/, p. 56.)

Oh, a long hour. How many drops of blood
shall fate exact before it has drunk
the cup of red wine to the bottom?

But not forever these knitted brows –
an unprecedented spring is coming:
Russia with Poland! Two holy virgin soils! *¹⁶⁷

The skilful use of onomatopoeia, internal rhymes and alliteration contrasts with conventional figures of speech like the “dead” metaphors “red wine” for blood and “spring” for victory or the weak synecdoche “puckered brows”. However, Bal’mont emphasizes his theme forcefully. Russia and Poland appear in the poem like Siamese twins, already joined together in the first two lines with the help of chiasmus. The geographical borders are blurred, and to the poet they are something native and dear. Russia and Poland find each other in a time of trial, and in the hour of victory “the festival of death” becomes “the triumph of blood”, a metaphor stressing not only the blood-relationship between the two nationalities, but also the role of the war experience as a binding sacrament.

In the other poem, “The Coat of Arms of the Secret Moon”, Bal’mont employs one of the classic topoi of “war literature”, that of great men of military history rising from their graves to assist their people in a time of crisis. Once a year the Polish knight comes back to life and can relive his battles against the enemies of his native country. The two concluding stanzas bring the poem up to the present moment:

In this hour when the Prussians,
those Satanic dogs,
raise a harsh barking,
isn’t it time for us, the Slavs,
believing in old talismans,

* “I pol’skaia, i russkaia zemlia,/ I russkie, i pol’skie vladen’ia./ Ia vizhu vas, rodimye viden’ia,/ Tam veter khodit, snegom shevelia.// Lesa, bolota, doly i polia./ Svishtit metel’. Zhurchit granat paden’e./ Vizzhit shrapnel’. Zhuzhzhane i guden’e./ Rychit tam prazdnik smerti, chas svoi dlia.// O, dolgii chas. I skol’ko kapel’ krovi/ Eshche istorgnet rok, poka do dna/ Ne vyp’et kubok krasnogo vina.// No ne navek nakhmurennye brovi, –/ Idet k nam nebyvalaia vesna:/ Rossiia s Pol’shei! Dve sviatye novi!”

¹⁶⁷ K.D. Bal’mont, “Prazdnik krovi”, *Russkoe slovo* 1.1.1915 1.

for all Poliane, for all Drevliane,
to rise together for our common land?

Polish knight, in love with life,
whose coat of arms is the Secret Moon,
rise, the hour calls us with its clanging.
Oh, let us, in the terrible combat,
forgive each other our common mistakes;
let us be strong, let us be resilient
in the Communion of Fire.^{*168}

Bal'mont appeals to both Russians and Poles in the name of something greater and more essential than what he euphemistically calls shared 'historical mistakes'. The Slavonic identity, geographical proximity and, once again, the war as Communion were to bring forth an alliance between the two people, according to Bal'mont. This was one of the important goals of the war. In world history, Russia and Poland were young nations, but they were destined for a great future, if they created a lasting union. Bal'mont was to specify what their common mission was, when the Polish theme became relevant for him again in 1916.

In October 1914, a group of Russian politicians, scientists, and writers were requested by *Birzhevye vedomosti* to answer the question "How do you see the future of Russo-Polish relations?"¹⁶⁹ The many crude censor's cuts were striking and revealed how inflamed the issue was. Evgenii Chirikov's answer, for example, was so heavily censored that it became completely unintelligible. Of the symbolists, Sologub, Merezhkovskii and Gippius had been invited to voice their opinion. What their answers had in common was a reverence for the Polish people and hope for the healing of a split nation. Using the same symbols of suffering and resurrection as in the official Russian manifesto, Gippius likened the Polish drama to the Road to Calvary. Evading the actual question posed by the newspaper, she confined herself to expressing the conviction that

* "V etot chas, kogda Prussaki,/ Sataninskie sobaki,/ Podnimaiut rezkii lai, –/ Ne pora li nam, Slavianam,/ Drevnim veria talismanam,/ Vsem Polianam, vsem Drevlianam,/ Druzhno vstat' za obshchii krai?// Rytsar' Pol'skii, v zhizn' vliublennyi,/ Gerb tvoi – Mesiats zataennyi,/ Vstan', nas chas zovet, zvenia./ O, prostim, pri groznoi sshibke,/ Nashi obshchie oshibki,/ Budem sil'ny, budem gibki,/ Chrez Prichastie Ognia."

168 K. Bal'mont, "Gerb zataennogo Mesiatsa", *Russkoe slovo* 1.2.1915 26.

169 "Budushchee russo-pol'skikh otnoshenii: Anketa Birzhevykh vedomostei", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 13.10.1914 14430.

Poland, after having gone through both Gethsemane and Golgotha, would now rise from the dead.¹⁷⁰ In her diary Gippius had already employed these central Christian emblems in connection with the first German offensive against Warsaw: "Poland is unhappy, just like Belgium, but not because of one but two misfortunes. Belgium's soul is undivided, while Poland is crucified on two crosses."¹⁷¹

The same thought was elaborated into an image in the poem "Three Crosses". Belgium is hanging on one cross, while Poland is on two crosses, not only physically, but also spiritually crucified.¹⁷² The idea was that Poland, as opposed to Belgium, lacked a definite national identity, as it was divided between three states, but Gippius' use of symbol was not convincing. The attempt to renew the emblematic Golgotha scene by replacing Christ and the two robbers with three Christ figures was doomed to failure. Also, the idea of comparing the suffering of two war-ridden nations to see which was "more crucified" was in itself unappealing, even if it revealed why Gippius felt more concerned with the Polish tragedy than with that of Belgium.

While Gippius confined herself to expressing her sympathy, visibly afraid of misusing the written word and debasing a national tragedy, Sologub candidly struck a neo-Slavophile pose in *Birzhevye vedomosti*. The war was a struggle of the Slavonic peoples against "a capitalistic and belligerent Prussianism". Since only a united Slavdom could defeat Germanism, the Slavs had "to build a common house, create a union of (CENSORED) people and show the world the order of a new (CENSORED) life". It was obvious that it was the world "free" that made the censors intervene, even if Sologub put greater emphasis on the Slavonic predilection for *sobornost'*, the voluntary spiritual unification based upon love, than on the freedom of the individual parts. As for the existing mistrust between Poland and Russia, Sologub hoped that it could be dispersed through shared hatred and love.¹⁷³ While it was true that anti-German sentiments made many Poles willing to co-operate with the Russians, Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism had very little attraction, as the Polish experience showed these concepts all too often to be synonymous with Russian chauvinism.

The prime task was to win the confidence of the Poles, and this implied a frank confession of Russian guilt. Both Merezhkovskii and Viacheslav Ivanov emphasized this aspect before going on to reveal what the future had in store

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 238.

¹⁷² Gippius, "Tri kresta", in *Kniga korol'ia Al'berta*, pp. 23-4.

¹⁷³ "Budushchee russko-pol'skikh otnoshenii".

for the united Russian and Polish peoples. In theory, the great European powers of the 18th century had embraced the ideas of the Enlightenment, but even so they had not hesitated to tear Poland apart. Russia's role in "the historical martyrdom of Poland" was especially grim, and the fact that the crimes had been committed not by the people but by the government, Ivanov felt to be poor consolation.¹⁷⁴ Russia should now atone, and not only in words, but also in deeds, demanded Merezhkovskii.¹⁷⁵ He was not more precise, but presumably shared Ivanov's view that a reconciliation was possible only if Russia restored the historical body of Poland.

For Merezhkovskii and Ivanov, however, much more was at stake than the reunion of the Polish people, the end to a century-old national animosity, and the attainment of greater civic freedom. Poland was not only a political structure, the future of which the two symbolists left undefined, but above all it was a "living soul" with a Slavonic identity. This identity Merezhkovskii and Ivanov both defined through Polish messianism. During the war Merezhkovskii read Adam Mickiewicz's Paris lectures from the 1840's, in which the Polish poet asserted that as humanity's path towards the ultimate truth had to pass through "crucifixion", the Poles were closer to the truth than any other nation:

Owning hardly anything on Earth, dispersed, erased from the European map, expelled, roaming, it has become "the people of God", "the new Israel". Poland is the sin-offering for the whole of mankind, "a crucified people".¹⁷⁶

Rejecting the claims of a Polish uniqueness, Merezhkovskii admitted that the Poles, nevertheless, possessed a historical experience that truly made them "God-bearers".¹⁷⁷ If humanity needed the Polish experience as a "sin-offering", then the Russians could employ Polish messianism as an antidote against their distorted form of Slavophilism. The trait that Merezhkovskii most appreciated was the lack of exclusiveness: the spirit of Polish messianism was not rapacious like its Russian counterpart, but subservient and sacrificial. Consequently, it was not European traits that the Russians had to learn from the

174 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. iv, pp. 656-7 ("Slavianskaia mirovshchina"). These passages had been crossed out by the censor when the article was published in *Novoe zveno* 49 (1914), pp. 4-6.

175 "Budushchee russko-pol'skikh otnoshenii".

176 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 58 ("Raspiaty narod"). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 26.7.1915 172.

177 *Ibid.*, p. 132 ("O religioznoi lzhi natsionalizma").

Poles, as for example Ivan Bunin claimed in his answer to the newspaper's question, but features which were truly Christian and universal.¹⁷⁸

Ivanov manifested his Polish sympathies on several public occasions.¹⁷⁹ For him the attraction of Polish messianism was not so much its humble character as its stress on the unique, universal mission of the Slavs and an exclusive Slavophile nucleus, the existence of which Merezhkovskii denied. Only in alliance with Russia could Poland fulfill its specific role in the universal Christian drama that was now being enacted. The common mission lay on the religious plane, and it was to be fulfilled in the spirit of a Christian *sobornost'*. Significantly, Ivanov paid no attention to the cleavage between Polish Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy, stressing instead the common belief in Christ. If indeed the third day in the tomb – the moment for Poland's resurrection – had now arrived, this was equal to a new stage in the spiritual history of mankind.¹⁸⁰

As a unifying slogan for the Poles and Russians, Fedor Sologub stated in late 1914 that "Warsaw must not be surrendered!"¹⁸¹ However, the fall of the Polish capital in the summer of 1915 could not be prevented. The ensuing Russian retreat from the eastern parts of the Kingdom of Poland ironically fulfilled the Russian promise of a reunion of divided Poland. The losses not only revealed military weakness, but also signified the failure of the mission of the August 1914 manifesto.

Konstantin Bal'mont responded to the events with two new sonnets, "More" ("Eshche") and "The Martyr" ("Muchenitsa"), both variations on the theme of suffering and martyrdom. In "More", Poland is implicitly compared to St. Sebastian who, pierced by a thousand arrows and not letting a groan pass his lips, awaits the one arrow that will finally open up the gates of Paradise for him.¹⁸² Adjusting to reality, Bal'mont this time refrained from depicting Poland as belligerent and instead painted a picture of a crushed rural idyll in "The Martyr".¹⁸³ Poland, allegorically represented by a woman, was to be dressed

¹⁷⁸ "Budushchee russko-pol'skikh otnoshenii".

¹⁷⁹ In December 1914 Ivanov, Ivan Bunin and Iurgis Baltrushaitis read their translations of Polish poetry in Moscow ("Pol'skii vecher", *Russkie vedomosti* 14.12.1914 288). In April 1915 Ivanov participated in a charity evening for the Polish and Lithuanian victims of war (advert. in *Russkie vedomosti* 5.4.1915 77).

¹⁸⁰ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, pp. 657-8 ("Slavianskaia mirovshchina") and 661-2 ("Pol'skii messianizm kak zhivaia sila"). First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 22.3.1916 82.

¹⁸¹ "Budushchee russko-pol'skikh otnoshenii".

¹⁸² K. Bal'mont, "Eshche", *Russkoe slovo* 7.7.1916 156.

¹⁸³ K. Bal'mont, "Muchenitsa", *Russkoe slovo* 7.7.1916 156.

in a coat of ermine, but is now forced to postpone its coronation ceremony. With the ermine coat, the symbol for both aristocratic saintliness and royalty, Bal'mont reminded the Poles of the Russian promise to restore the Kingdom of Poland, implicitly claiming that their fate under German and Russian hegemony would be diametrically opposed.

Written as they were under the fresh impression of defeat, neither "More" nor "The Martyr" gave any promises for the future. The situation, which not only included German occupation but also internal Polish feuds, was presented as a trial that had to be endured. In the poem "The Battle of the Eagles" ("Bitva orlov") of September 1915, however, Bal'mont struck a new chord.¹⁸⁴ The battle between Germany and Poland was represented by an allegorical duel between a white and a black eagle. On an emblematic level the picture was simple and precise, as the eagle on the Polish coat of arms is white, while the corresponding German bird is black. White against Black was also a struggle between Life and Death, heavenly virginity and hell, God and the Prince of Darkness, and thereby the choice of colour adequately illustrated Bal'mont's view of the inner essence of the war. His "The Battle of Eagles" ends in a prophecy of an ultimate victory for the white eagle after a sudden wind from the sea has come to its assistance.

Bal'mont now assumed the Romantic role of the poet as seer. Through dreams and visions he has received a message that he makes public in the form of a poem. With the authority of an acclaimed symbolist, he commented on his "The Battle of the Eagles": "This is how it must be. Because this is what I dreamt. And the dreams of the poet come true."¹⁸⁵ The utterance not only claimed clairvoyance but also – in the spirit of Sologub – the poet's ability to impose his will on the material world. As it turned out, Bal'mont had as little insight into the development of events or power to shape the future as his fellow-symbolists. Inspiring as it was meant to be, "The Battle of the Eagles" did not do justice to the complex Polish situation. The allusion to the coming, decisive military assistance from what was evidently meant to be the British side was also unfounded.

In 1916 Russian interest in the Polish question was revitalized by Polish refugees. An influential figure for the Moscow symbolists was the writer Tadeusz Miciński. In early 1916 he gave a talk on Polish messianism at the Religious-Philosophical Society of Moscow where he, quite in the spirit of the Polish émigrés of the 1830's and 1840's, confessed a belief in a unique national

184 K. Bal'mont, "Bitva orlov", *Niva* 39 (1915), p. 720.

185 K. Bal'mont, "Slovo o Pol'she", *Russkoe slovo* 7.7.1916 156.

Polish soul and the sacrificial mission of Poland. The fate of Poland was linked with the martyrdom of Christ: if Christ was only a myth, then no hope existed for a Polish resurrection. Ivanov was much impressed by Miciński's lecture. By then almost alone in the neo-Slavophile camp, he was very pleased to find a Polish thinker for whom Polish messianism was a living force and who furthermore viewed the Polish question as part of the Slavonic question, searching like himself for a synthesis between the Polish and Russian souls.¹⁸⁶

The meeting with Miciński was also of great importance for Bal'mont. In February 1916, they appeared together at an evening in honour of the Polish writer Juliusz Słowacki. Bal'mont's speech bore the significant title "The Transfiguration of Sacrifice: Thoughts about Słowacki and Poland" ("Preobrazhenie zhertvy. Mysli o Slovatskom i Pol'she").¹⁸⁷ Another talk, "A Word about Poland" ("Slovo o Pol'she"), delivered in July 1916 at a Polish evening in Moscow, reveals how strongly Bal'mont had also been affected by Polish messianism. The occasion was intended to have historical importance, as a new, projected Polish anthem – with a Russian translation by Bal'mont – was performed. In his speech Bal'mont elaborated some of the thoughts that he had expressed in his poems on Poland. Even in the situation where the whole of Polish territory was occupied by the Central Powers, Bal'mont persisted in linking the Polish and Russian questions and in anticipating a common renaissance of the Slavonic peoples. His earlier Slavophile leanings had been based upon an interest in Slavonic folk culture and mythology, but now he was moving in a Pan-Slavic direction. Within the Slavonic family he attributed a central role to Russia and Poland for both historical and national-psychological reasons. Together these two peoples stood for "the integrity and inviolability of the Slavonic countenance, the Slavonic genius", and just as earlier in history they had together stopped the Mongol and Teuton invasions, they were now forced to fight a common enemy. As for the future, Bal'mont promised Poland a geographical reunification and freedom, without, however, specifying what he meant by "freedom".¹⁸⁸

Bal'mont found reconciliation between Russia and Poland and an acknowledgement of their mutual injustices to be necessary both with a view to the war and to the future. Understandable as they were, Polish feelings of bitterness had to be suppressed, while Russia for its part had to learn to respect the entire "countenance" of Poland. With the help of an old legend about how the

¹⁸⁶ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. iv, p. 665 ("Pol'skii messianizm kak zhivaia sila").

¹⁸⁷ "Russko-pol'skoe sblizhenie", *Utro Rossii* 17.2.1916 48.

¹⁸⁸ Bal'mont, "Slovo o Pol'she".

devil stole the sun and made everybody suffer in darkness, Bal'mont expressed some of his misgivings about his native country. Germany, the contemporary Satan, had stolen the "sun", but Russia, the "knight", would in due time recapture it. At the same time, Russia had to take care not to repeat the German offense of keeping the "sun" for itself, hiding it from others in a burst of Great Russian chauvinism.¹⁸⁹

When praising the Polish people, Bal'mont was implicitly criticizing the Russians, revealing, in fact, a closer affinity with the Poles than with his countrymen. Through writers like Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Stanisław Wyspiański, Zygmunt Krasiński and Tadeusz Miciński, Bal'mont had come to know the Polish character as vigorously active, eager to reshape the world and, most important, possessing a developed sense of individuality. The adherence to individuality, "the last reflection of the knightly spirit", made the Polish people fit not only to withstand the Germans, but also to play a vital role in an even greater, yet only vaguely envisioned connection, where the strong personality would become "a weapon for God's plans".¹⁹⁰ Where Merezhkovskii stressed the role of sacrifice and service and Ivanov praised the Slavonic feeling of *sobornost'*, Bal'mont significantly turned his attention to the free individual in outlining his dream of a common Slavonic universal mission. For all three, the Polish question formed the basis for eschatological thinking.

The Tragedy of the Victimized Jews

News of shocking incidents came not only from German-occupied territories. Within the borders of the Russian empire the war exposed and accentuated the difficult situation of the Jews. Russia was the only major European nation where Jews were not guaranteed the same legal rights as other citizens. Their possibilities to choose places of residence and occupations were restricted, and recurrent pogroms caused many to live in perpetual fear.¹⁹¹ In addition to the legalized oppression of the Jews, a wave of popular anti-Semitic feelings arose due to wartime setbacks. This was so much more appalling, as the Russian Jews showed an unfailing loyalty towards their native country. They were called up on the same conditions as other Russian citizens, and there were in all about half a million Jewish soldiers in the Russian army, about one tenth of the entire Jewish community. Young Jews voluntarily interrupted their studies

189 *Ibid.*

190 *Ibid.*

191 Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, *Antisemitismus und reaktionäre Utopie: Russischer Konservatismus im Kampf gegen den Wandel von Staat und Gesellschaft, 1890-1917* (Hamburg, 1978), pp. 146-50.

abroad, where they had gone to escape the restrictions on studying at home, and returned to Russia to join the army.

In the Army Council and the officer corps, anti-Semitic feelings were common, and by law, members of the Jewish faith could not be promoted to the rank of officer. The press was free to spread rumours about the alleged deceitfulness of Jewish soldiers, medical orderlies and doctors, but for a long time was forbidden from mentioning Jews who had received military distinctions. The fear of espionage hit Jewish civilians hard, and there were several examples of mass expulsions from the immediate vicinity of the front under the accusation of having assisted the enemy.

The liberal Russian intelligentsia was conscious of the predicament of the Jewish population even before the war. In connection with pogroms it had more than once raised its voice in defence of the persecuted. During the war the struggle against anti-Semitism became one of the issues that it could rally around almost unanimously. As well as the ethical and religious arguments against anti-Semitism, there was also an awareness that the predicament of the Russian Jews was used by the enemy in his propaganda and that this greatly harmed the Russian image.

It was German criticism of England and France for their alliance with “barbaric”, anti-Semitic Russia that generated the first significant Russian comment on the question. In his article “The First Step” (“Pervaia stupen”) of November 1914, Leonid Andreev labelled anti-Semitism a disgrace for a civilized nation. Only by freeing themselves from this kind of superstition could Russians win self-respect and become worthy Europeans. Andreev wanted to believe that signs of such a change of attitude were already discernible, but the fate of his article revealed how inflamed the question was in actuality. “The First Step” was to be simultaneously published in *Birzhevye vedomosti* and *Utro Rossii*, but while the Moscow censorship let the article pass, *Birzhevye vedomosti* was forced to leave it out.¹⁹²

Andreev’s initiative was soon taken up by others. In January 1915, Maksim Gor’kii, Ivan Bunin and Fedor Sologub met at the latter’s flat to discuss a public appeal for the Jews of Russia.¹⁹³ Their open letter, “To the Russian People” (“K russkomu narodu”), was published in *Utro Rossii* on 1 March. Of the symbolists, Sologub, Merezhkovskii, Gippius and Ivanov signed the plea that the

192 L.N. Andreev, “Pervaia stupen”, in *Shchit: Literaturnyi sbornik* (Moscow, 1915), pp. 3–10. First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 27.11.1914 294. About the prohibition, see *Birzhevye vedomosti* 27.11.1914 14520.

193 *Ustami Buninykh: Dnevnik Ivana Alekseevicha i Very Nikolaevny i drugie arkhivnye materialy*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main, 1977), p. 142.

Jews be granted the same rights as other Russian citizens. Another action in the struggle against anti-Semitism was the publication of the anthology *The Shield* (*Shchit*) in September 1915. In February, Andreev, Gor'kii and Sologub had published an appeal to the Russian intelligentsia, asking for material for a book which was to gather arguments against anti-Semitism and stimulate discussion of the subject.¹⁹⁴ The money raised was to be given to the poor Jewish population which had suffered because of the war. As the constitution of the group of initiators shows, neither strained personal relations nor diverging attitudes to the war prevented cooperation in the struggle for the rights of the Jews. *The Shield* with its impressive list of contributors became a major event in Russian literature during the war period, and among the many writers, composers, painters, scientists and politicians who showed their concern, the symbolists occupied a prominent position.¹⁹⁵

Fedor Sologub, one of the staunchest Russian critics of anti-Semitism, contributed with several works – a short story, a poem and three articles.¹⁹⁶ Most of the chief arguments against anti-Semitism – both institutionalized and popular – were brought up. Sologub hoped that the war could function in itself as an argument against anti-Semitism. Firstly, it was a crying injustice that the Jews who had faithfully rallied to the defence of Russia were not given equal rights with others. Secondly, a nation could be strong only if loved by all its citizens, while the sowing of divisions during an ongoing war was madness. Finally, there was an obvious contradiction, bordering on hypocrisy, between Russia's official claim to be fighting for the rights of small nationalities and the fact that it was persecuting one of its own minorities. Only after having become a nation of free people could Russia win credibility for its declarations and earn the respect of other nations.¹⁹⁷

194 Leonid Andreev, Fedor Sologub, M. Gor'kii, "Anketa ob evreikh: Otkrytoe pis'mo k public trekh russkikh pisatelei", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 3.2.1915 14648.

195 For the history of *Shchit*, see A.L. Sobolev, "Cum scuto: Viacheslav Ivanov – uchastnik sbornika 'Shchit'", in *Donum homini universalis: sbornik statei v chest' 70-letia N.V. Kotrelova* (Moscow, 2011), pp. 315–46.

196 Sologub's publications in *Shchit* included the short story "Svet vechernyi" (first publ. in *Argus* 1 /1915/), the poem "Brat'iam" (first publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 9.10.1914 14422) and the articles "Otechestvo dlia vseh" (first publ. in *Otechestvo* 1 /1915/), "Vechnyi zhid" (first publ. in *Russkie vedomosti* 11.8.1915 184) and "Vse vmeste" (first publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 5.2.1915 14652).

197 For an analysis of Sologub's publications on the Jewish question, see E. Vaisband, "Stikhotvorenie F. Sologuba 'Brat'iam': Pol'sko-evreiskaia adresatsiia v kontekste Pervoi mirovoi voyny", in *Politika literatury – poetika vlasti: Sbornik statei*. Studia Russica Helsingiensia et Tartuensia (Moscow, 2014), pp. 127–47.

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, who had already attacked anti-Semitism on several occasions before the war, stressed the same contradiction between stated ideals and reality: "Outside Russia we liberate, but inside we oppress. We feel pity for everyone, but to the Jews we are pitiless."¹⁹⁸ If Russia indeed wanted to liberate the world – a cherished thought for many of the symbolists – it had to start by liberating its Jewish population. Otherwise the Russians would appear as liars, able to love only that which was faraway. For Merezhkovskii the issue was so simple that it hardly needed any argumentation:

It is hard, painful, a disgrace... But even through the pain and the shame we shout, repeat, vow, assure people, who do not know the multiplication table, that $2 \times 2 = 4$, that the Jews are human beings just like us, that they are not enemies of their fatherland, not traitors, but honest Russian citizens, loving Russia no less than we do; that anti-Semitism is a stigma on the face of Russia.¹⁹⁹

Anti-Semitism was also out of keeping with the notion of the "Russian soul" as gentle and "all-human". Sologub was not shaken in his belief in the Russian people, as he placed his hope explicitly in the universal quality of the national character. Others, like Maksim Gor'kii, drew the conclusion that all talk about a "magnanimous, beautiful Russian soul" was unfounded, and that the Russians had to learn from the morally superior Jews how to become true Europeans.²⁰⁰ Zinaida Gippius also stressed that Russians were not entitled to see themselves as a Chosen People and condemn the brutality of other peoples, as long as anti-Semitism flourished in Russia. In her diary, she included an incident where a Jew, who had come to Russia with the first stream of refugees from Germany, had held up his mutilated hand. The fingers had not been cut off by inhuman Germans, as the journalists assumed, but during a Russian pogrom.²⁰¹ Gippius' contribution to *The Shield* was a poem, "He took our suffering..." ("On prinial skorb'..."), in which she without any rhetoric reminded the reader that Christ was a Jew and that the Jews of today were thus his countrymen. Christian arguments against anti-Semitism were also put forward by Bal'mont and Ivanov. It may have seemed surprising that even Bal'mont regarded anti-Semitism from a Christian point of view. His early po-

¹⁹⁸ D. Merezhkovskii, "Evreiskii vopros, kak russkii", in *Shchit*, p. 138.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-7.

²⁰⁰ M. Gor'kii, "Vremia ot vremeni – i vse chashche!..." *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

²⁰¹ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 236.

etry had demonstrated an irreligious tendency²⁰² and had even become the object of juridical prosecution for blasphemy,²⁰³ but in the war he showed a definite leaning towards Christianity. Not only "A Voice from There" ("Golos ottuda"), Bal'mont's poem in *The Shield*, but also his own volume of poetry *The Ash-tree: The Vision of a Tree* (*Iasen': Videnie dreva*, 1916) bear witness to inner changes.

Bal'mont's main point was the same as Gippius': Christ was also a Jew. A further argument was that Christ had preached equality among men: "There are neither Hellenes nor Jews;/ there is the Star of Bethlehem!" ("Nest' Ellina, ni Iudeia,/ Est' Vifleemskaia zvezda!")²⁰⁴ The pious and humble tone, not to speak of the theme of "A Voice from There", stood in sharp contrast to the hatred of the enemy that Bal'mont demonstrated in other connections. "A Voice from There" was a purely Christian poem, but it could similarly be read as a reaffirmation, or even as a renewal of the symbolist world view, a step towards what could be called Christian symbolism, as the voice from "there", Christ, is given the function of a link between the two realities, matter and spirit, man and eternity.

Viacheslav Ivanov demonstrated a greater awareness of the roots of modern anti-Semitism. Spiritual anti-Semitism he characterized as a "Trojan Horse from Berlin", a fashionable but harmful doctrine which ascribed superior traits to the Aryan race and culture, while branding everything Semitic as a hampering influence on Aryan development. Ivanov fiercely rejected these thoughts as godless. A true Christian was a Semite in his heart: "For the mystic, the body of the Church is the real, though invisible body of Christ, and through Christ it is a body from the seed of Abraham."²⁰⁵ Through baptism the Christian became the child of Abraham and thus in a mystical sense a brother of the Jews. Anti-Semitism was a step away from Christ, and therefore Ivanov gave the Jews the role of providential examiners of the Christian people and their love of Christ. If Christians both in words and deeds confessed Christ as their Lord, Jews would understand that he truly was the Messiah.²⁰⁶ From Ivanov's apocalyptic Christian point of view this was of course the ultimate goal, even if it was not stressed.

202 K.M. Azadovskii, "Bal'mont, Konstantin Dmitrievich", in *Russkie pisateli 1800-1917: Biograficheskii slovar'*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1989), p. 151.

203 Konstantin Bal'mont, *Izbrannoe: Stikhotvoreniia. Perevody. Stat'i* (Moscow, 1990), p. 585.

204 K. Bal'mont, "Golos ottuda", in *Shchit*, p. 27.

205 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 309 ("K ideologii evreiskogo voprosa"). Also in *Shchit* (1915).

206 *Ibid.*, pp. 309-10.

Valerii Briusov has been called an anti-Semite,²⁰⁷ but his contribution to *The Shield*, the sketch “A Passover Meeting” (“Paskhal’naia vstrecha”), neither confirms nor disputes this claim. It is a true story of how two Jewish brothers in the Russian army lose touch with each other in the war, but are accidentally brought together through the hospitality of a Jewish family in Warsaw during Passover. The theme of the sketch was not anti-Semitism, but the curious twists of fate. Irrespective of his personal feelings, Briusov nevertheless supported the campaign against anti-Semitism by participating in *The Shield*.

Two symbolists were missing from *The Shield*, namely Belyi and Blok. Belyi was abroad and therefore difficult to reach.²⁰⁸ Blok’s absence was, as his notebook reveals, not mere chance. In January 1915, he was invited to visit Sologub together with other writers. He does not reveal the reason for the invitation, but as he complains in passing a few weeks later that Andreev, Gor’kii and Sologub do not stop pestering him,²⁰⁹ it is obvious that the editors of *The Shield* were trying hard to ensure that one of Russia’s greatest poets would be among the contributors.²¹⁰ In spite of his otherwise great readiness to support charitable anthologies, Blok demonstratively chose to stay out of *The Shield*. For those who knew Blok personally, this hardly came as a surprise. Gippius, for example, was well aware of his deep antipathy for the Jews,²¹¹ an antipathy that prevented him from joining the others in their defence of a persecuted people.

The Neo-Slavophiles

Viacheslav Ivanov: The Messianic Task of Russia

“In our society, there are many prominent people who regard every war as unjust, irreligious. I believe this war to be holy in its inner essence and a war

²⁰⁷ Khodasevich, p. 50.

²⁰⁸ It is possible that Belyi would have chosen not to participate in *Shchit*. His notorious article “Marked Culture” (“Shtempelevannaia kul’tura”) from 1909, directed against what he saw as the harmful role of the Jews in Russian cultural life, had a clear anti-semitic ring.

²⁰⁹ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, pp. 254–5.

²¹⁰ In their commentaries to Blok’s *Zapisnye knizhki*, the Soviet literary critics, for whom Russian anti-Semitism was a taboo, merely state that Blok is referring to “a literary questionnaire” (*ibid.*, p. 567).

²¹¹ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 381. See also A. Shteinberg, *Druz’ia moikh rannikh let: 1911–1928* (Paris, 1991).

of liberation, and I regard it as something very positive.”²¹² In this categorical way Viacheslav Ivanov supported the war in an interview for a Moscow newspaper in December 1914. At a meeting arranged by the Moscow Religious-Philosophical Society two months earlier, he had also voiced his enthusiasm for the historical moment. The war was to function both domestically and universally as a grand upheaval. Despondency, despair and denial of life would be overcome, and a broad social recovery would occur.²¹³ The war signified the beginning of a new spiritual epoch for humankind, the fulfillment of the apocalyptic anticipations that the Russian symbolists among others had nourished. Quoting Petr Kropotkin, the anarchist-turned-patriot, Ivanov predicted that the war would create a “new history”.²¹⁴

Set against the gigantic war, individuals were but tiny grains of dust. All past experiences seemed irrelevant, and it was difficult to understand fully the meaning of events. In a poem Ivanov expressed this overwhelming sense of bewilderment:

Into another air we were suddenly carried away,
we, yesterday's forerunners of ourselves...
I want to prophesy; the Muse tells me: 'Pray!'^{*215}

The confession of awe in face of the war was actually just a figure of speech. As usual Ivanov showed firm confidence concerning the location of the “lodestars”. He was never to confess any doubts at the sight of the suffering and destruction caused by the war, and instead of being dumbstruck, he immediately set out to reveal the transcendental truth beneath the surge of external events. In articles, and partly also in his poetry, Ivanov assumed the role of a seer, confidently parting the curtain of time, in order to reveal the wise and divine plan behind history.

Like Merezhkovskii and Gippius, Ivanov looked at the war from the point of view of apocalyptic Christianity. History was the fulfillment of a Providential plan, the goal being the establishment of universal Christianity.²¹⁶ This dream of a universal community (*vselenskaia obshchina*), or, as Ivanov also

²¹² Quoted in Tsekhnovitser, p. 125.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2.

²¹⁴ Viacheslav Ivanov, “Vselenskoe delo”, *Russkaia mysl'* 12 (1914), part II, p. 106.

^{*} “V efir inoi my vdrug pereneslis'/ Sebia samikh vcherashnie predtechy.../ Khochu proro-chit'; Muza mne: “molis'!”

²¹⁵ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 24 (“Drugiiu poetu”). First publ. in *Apollon* 10 (1914), p. 9.

²¹⁶ Viacheslav Ivanov, “Rossiia, Angliia i Aziia”, *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 18.12.1915 15277.

put it, a universal Church or Godmanhood,²¹⁷ was old; it had been expressed in poetic form as early as 1889.²¹⁸ The word “*obshchina*”, central to the Russian Slavophiles and populists of the 19th century, lent a distinctly Russian flavour to the future Christian world, but Ivanov also spoke in more neutral terms about the revelation of the World Soul or the final fulfillment of the “chorus spirit” (*khorovoe nachalo*).²¹⁹ The latter concept had already been employed by the Slavophiles to denote a complete harmony between the individual and the collective,²²⁰ but Ivanov’s scholarly work on the Dionysos myth had given fresh impetus to it.

By applying the word “*vselenskii*” (universal) Ivanov indicated that he was referring to a spiritual rather than a socio-political entity. He refrained from outlining the external forms of the future universal community and spent instead more energy on defining the spirit of *sobornost’* which would reign among humankind in the future. *Sobornost’* was another key word for the Slavophiles, expressing the ideal of a free unity, “conciliarism”,²²¹ and Ivanov’s definition of the term came close to theirs: “(...) a unification in which the uniting individuals attain the definite disclosure and determination of their real, unique, and original essence, their absolute creative freedom, and which makes every one an uttered word, new and necessary for the others.”²²²

Sobornost’ was a timeless all-Christian ideal, but Ivanov wanted to see it as characteristic for the Slavs, and especially for the Russians. The fact that the word had no exact equivalent in other languages was for him a proof that the phenomenon was as yet unfamiliar outside the Slavonic world. From this Ivanov concluded that Russia, and in a broader sense, Slavdom, were to fulfill a special cultural and religious mission in the history of humanity. In order to escape accusations of chauvinism, Ivanov stressed that he was not praising the empirically perceivable Russia. Present Russia was in fact far from being the City of God (*Bozhii Grad*) that some claimed it to be. To see Russia only as phenomenon and attach importance mainly to the empirical character of

217 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 341 (“Zhivoe predanie”). First publ. as “Zhivoe predanie: Otvet N.A. Berdiaevu” in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 18.3.1915 14734.

218 Quoted in Averintsev, p. 10.

219 *Ibid.*, pp. 37–8.

220 Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teachings of the Slavophiles: A Study of Romantic Ideology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1952), p. 135.

221 Andzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Oxford, 1988), p. 95.

222 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 260 (“Legion i sobornost’”). First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 27.2.1916 58.

its people and culture was a mistake typical of the Russian Westernizers, the materialists and positivists. For a genuine Slavophile, the sometimes even appalling social and psychological everyday realities were only temporary exterior forms, while the “soul of Russia”, Holy Russia, was an ontological concept that only he who revered Russia was able to comprehend. One of Ivanov’s favourite examples of a truly Slavophile approach to Russia was a poem by Fedor Tiutchev, “These poor villages...” (“Eti bednye selen’ia...”, 1855).²²³ Realistically depicted nature and the poor villages only form an ephemeral cover, while Holy Russia is perceived as a reflection, a quiet shimmering breaking through the reality and perceivable only by the meek at heart.²²⁴ For Ivanov it was this belief in a metaphysical Russian reality that formed the living core of the Slavophilism which he himself was willing to support.²²⁵

In his first book of poetry, *Lodestars* (*Kormchie zvezdy*, 1902), Ivanov had already revealed an interest in the metaphysical, eternal side of Russia. His belief in the universal role of his native country was based upon a religious and mystical interpretation of the Russian soul and not so much upon knowledge. Traits of character like kindness and a Scythian spirit, the reverse of the Western preference for moderation, along with a predisposition for *sobornost’* made Russians the Chosen People. Russia did not itself embody God, since other nations could become “God-bearers” as well,²²⁶ but as regards the situation in 1914, Ivanov found Russia’s spiritual countenance to be unique. Ivanov’s neo-Slavophilism was primarily inspired by his reading of Tiutchev and Dostoevskii, and therefore it was fitting that he found the ideal personification of the Russian soul not in real life, but in literature. Dostoevskii’s Alesha Karamazov was a prophetic embodiment of the genuine Russian consciousness with its thirst for *sobornost’*, and the epithet Ivanov accepted for himself was therefore an “Aleshan”.²²⁷

It was the metaphysical Holy Russia that Ivanov and most of the other neo-Slavophiles felt a reverence for, but they were reticent about their position on the politics of contemporary Russia. Nikolai Berdiaev tried to provoke Ivanov to define his standpoint in political terms by accusing him of a submissive, “female” attitude to state power and a consequent justification of the prevailing social structure. Instead of discussing political affairs in religious terms,

²²³ Tiutchev, p. 191 (“Eti bednye selen’ia”).

²²⁴ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 343 (“Zhivoe predanie”).

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

Berdiaev proposed a secularization of power.²²⁸ Ivanov's answer was revealing. In 1905 he had supported the revolution, attacking Russian autocracy on a religious basis. Now he had come to adopt the Slavophile view that the will of the people had been entrusted to the hands of the tsar, who was thus called on to exercise power. In this transmission of power there was a religious element. The tsar was the son of the Church, that is of all Christians viewed as a spiritual body, while the people formed its free family. No opposition could therefore exist between the state and the people; but even so Ivanov made it clear that Russia needed not only a new religious, but also a new social doctrine. The St. Petersburg period, an epoch characterized by "betrothment" (*zhenikhovstvo*) and "caesaro-papism", the submissive subordination of the church to the state, was coming to its end, and the Russian people were now mature enough to take more responsibility. Ivanov called for a religious responsibility for Russia, evidently hoping for the emergence of a unique *sobornost'*-based Christian democracy.²²⁹

On the path towards a universal, Christian community there existed a major obstacle for humanity – Germany. As with Sologub, it appears that this conviction dawned upon Ivanov only in 1914. He came to pay much attention to the "German riddle", one reason being his own biographical and cultural connections with Germany. In the 1880's and 1890's, he had studied at the University of Berlin under the famous historian Theodor Mommsen. In an autobiographical sketch, Ivanov later remembered how at the end of the 1880's he had told the politically liberal Mommsen about his fears concerning a possible war between Germany and Russia. "We are not that bad", was the old man's answer.²³⁰ The point of the story, when told in 1917, was that the future Russian symbolist had been right in his early forebodings, while the German scholar had not realized the extent of the changes that the German nation had gone through at the end of the century.

German literature, especially Goethe, Novalis and Schopenhauer, and German music had been of great importance for Ivanov in his formative years. Later Nietzsche became a dominant influence. Rejecting the philosopher's amorality and atheism, Ivanov modified Nietzsche's thoughts to suit his own world view. Programmatic individualism was turned into a religious calling and the concept of the "superman" into a universal "supermankind".²³¹ Instead

228 Nikolai Berdiaev, "Epigonam slavianofil'stva", *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 18.2.1915 14678.

229 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 346 ("Zhivoe predanie").

230 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 16 ("Avtobiograficheskoe pis'mo S.A. Vengerovu"). First publ. in *Russkaia literatura XX veka: 1890-1910*, vol. III, part 2, book 8 (Moscow, [1917]), pp. 81-96.

231 Averintsev, p. 6.

of denying his own past, Ivanov drew a sharp dividing line between classical German culture and the modern German state, agreeing with the prevailing opinion that the 1870's had been a turning-point in the development of the nation. The wish to create state unity had been natural and inevitable, but the German people had become intoxicated by their technical, economic and military successes and had yielded to a national *hubris*.²³² A German chauvinism, a self-satisfied and insatiable nationalism, resulted in even the sharpest brains, like Mommsen, yielding to a cult of state organization.²³³ The Germans deserted metaphysics, the heritage of the Middle Ages and Romanticism, and instead fostered a practical mind. As a result their creative forces ebbed away, and a philistine spirit came to dominate contemporary German culture.²³⁴ In philosophy and theology a shift occurred from idealism and religion to positivism.

Everything that was dear to Ivanov and, implicitly to Russian symbolism, had no place in modern Germany. The great German cultural past had been deserted. The Germans did not believe in the "living soul of the Earth", nor did they carry any dreams of Sophia, the Eternal Feminine. However, the most deplorable and dangerous trait of modern Germany was its distorted ideal of the collective. During the war, Ivanov came to attach much significance to humanity's choice between two types of collective, a Russian Christian type and a German anti-Christian one, seeing this as the essence of the war. In Germany the notion of the Church as the earthly God-state had been rejected, while the state organization had been deified. To prove his claim, Ivanov quoted Wilhelm Ostwald, the famous scholar, who had created a theory in praise of the organizational capabilities of the German nation. According to Ostwald, humankind passed through three stages of historical development: herd mentality, individualism and organization. While Russia had not yet reached the second stage, and France and England had proved themselves incapable of attaining the third, only Germany had come to the highest level. Its mission was therefore to give the world the "culture of organization" and "an organized culture".²³⁵

It is easy to see why Ivanov felt provoked by Ostwald's scheme. Before the war, he had paid much attention to the crisis of individualism and predicted

²³² Ivanov, "Vselenskoe delo", pp. 99-100.

²³³ It is surprising that Ivanov, only five years earlier, had criticized "the blind followers of the Russian Slavophiles" for their belief in the "state principle" instead of in Russia as the "Rome of the Spirit" (*Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 326 ["O russkoi idee"/]).

²³⁴ Ivanov, "Vselenskoe delo", pp. 101 ff.

²³⁵ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, pp. 254-5 ("Legion i sobornost").

the birth of an organic epoch.²³⁶ Ostwald proposed a type of human collective which was the very opposite of the Russian *sobornost'*-based community. Instead of forming the peak of human development, this would mean, according to Ivanov, a return to a pre-human period. It was a mechanical organization where everyone would subordinate himself to the quantitative and qualitative division of national labour. As in Hegel's teachings, the strengthening of the national identity and the state became the goal of a "utilitarian cooperation".²³⁷ Individuality would eventually be lost, as unity was achieved through de-personalization. Even the most outstanding German intellectuals formed molecules of one single brain, only capable of thinking functionally.

With its perverted culture and its cult of the state organism, modern Germany formed a universal menace even during periods of peace. Like Dostoevskii's Grand Inquisitor, it tempted other nations to spiritual suicide. Germany was above all an enemy of man's inner freedom. With the help of its false organizational ideals, it strove to deprive individuals and nations of their unique personality and their God:

Modern German culture is nothing but the all-embracing organization of the German will to an enslavement of the world, and it has no other essence than the biological axiom: "sumus qui sumus, vae victis"! In our language such criminal intent by spiritual means is called an insult to the spirit and atheism.²³⁸

In the war Germany had openly attacked other nations, and humankind was now being forced to make a decisive choice:

What will triumph on earth – peace, or the sword, honest work, or plundering in the form of state omnipotence? Will the Promised Horizons of a new, happier and blessed century unfold, or will we, driven by ferocious hordes of madmen and ourselves infected by their madness, dart together with them into the darkness of a pre-Christian savagery, into the primordial mazes of the spirit, where the blond Beast will reign?²³⁹

The basic conflict in the war was thus that between Germany and Russia. It was the Slavonic peoples in the first instance that Germany wanted to engulf,

²³⁶ Fedor Stepun, *Vstrechi i razmyshleniia: Izbrannye stat'i* (London, 1992), pp. 177–8.

²³⁷ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 256 ("Legion i sobornost").

²³⁸ Ivanov, "Vselenskoe delo", p. 103.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

turn into manure for its own culture and then, eventually, exterminate. There had been a risk that an alliance would be born between Germany and Russia. Together they could have defeated England and France, after which Germany would have been free to turn against its principal enemy, the Slavs. Providence had prevented this from happening, and from the outset of the war the meaning of the struggle had thus been manifest.²⁴⁰

A Russian victory in the war would form a turning-point in the history of humankind. Not only would the German danger be eliminated, but together with the other Slavonic peoples the Russians would at last be able to utter their “word” to history. Employing his cherished agricultural images, Ivanov talked about Russia’s duty to reach for the “universal plough” and fulfill its universal mission. Unlike German claims to superiority, the idea of a universal Russian mission was not an expression of a false national self-assertion, since it was not voluntary:

Roused under the compulsion of Divine Providence, it [Russia, ВН] has taken up the terrestrial sword for the heroic defence of its own and its kin’s hearths, and for the sacred responsibilities that have been entrusted to it, and for the hopes that have been set upon it, and for the promises of the Spirit that have been given to it, and through this also for its own universal cause.²⁴¹

Humanity needed a new form of collective consciousness of a kind which only the Slavs could offer. But as a Christian freedom in unity and love existed only as a latent possibility in Russia, the basic task was to develop and reveal a nationwide *sobornost’*. A condition for Russia’s great future was that the intelligentsia had to find its way back to the people, a problem to which Ivanov, like Blok, had devoted much attention. Wishful thinking made Ivanov already discern some positive signs of change during the first months of the war. One was the natural emergence of a national “like-mindedness and like-willedness”, another the rise of Russian patriotism among the educated classes. Patriotism in Russia had previously been considered something almost shameful and had been equated with “smugness, contentment, prosperity”.²⁴² As these were a Slavophile’s list of negative Western traits, Ivanov managed to present both the absence and the emergence of patriotism as signs of Russian spiritual supremacy.

²⁴⁰ Ivanov, “Rossiia, Angliia i Aziia”.

²⁴¹ Ivanov, “Vselenskoe delo”, p. 98.

²⁴² Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 350 (“Dva lada russkoi dushi”).

The war was the external expression of a struggle between two spiritual forces. Germany was inspired by the “gloomy demon of violence and compulsion”, something which could be seen from the “frenziedly ferocious visage” of the German regiments,²⁴³ while Russia, on the contrary, could count on the protection of “an inviolable Wall, the universal Mother of Light”, if it remained faithful to its universal mission.²⁴⁴ The cross of Christ rested heavily on Russia’s shoulders, but on the cross was written the promise “In this sign you will conquer”, just as on the cross that Constantine the Great had seen before his battle against the enemies of Christianity.²⁴⁵ Since Germany showed no signs of a spiritual awakening, Ivanov saw no future for it in the postwar world order.²⁴⁶ When the split between nations was bigger than ever, when violence and hatred were triumphing, Ivanov could paradoxically feel himself strengthened by an optimistic belief that a “new, happier and more blessed century” might be dawning.²⁴⁷ As the war had a decisive role in attaining the promised goal, Russia was fighting for a “universal cause” also when it only defended its own borders.

At the banquet in honour of Briusov in January 1915, Ivanov urged his colleague to return to poetry from the realm of war journalism.²⁴⁸ Even if the role of literature was accentuated in the new historical phase, it did not have to deal explicitly with the war. What Ivanov called for was a “religious literature” which would express the “Russian idea” and define and strengthen the national consciousness. Literature had first to become truly national, and only then, as Dostoevskii had said, could it become all-human (*vsechelovecheskii*). With the voice of a high priest, Ivanov urged the other symbolists to start working in this spirit: “Approach with the fear of God and with faith in your heart!”²⁴⁹

The task of the poet, according to Ivanov, was not to impose his will upon events, but to reveal the will residing in them, something as yet unperceived by the majority of men.²⁵⁰ His own topical poems were mystical and visionary, all dealing with the metaphysical aspect of the war. The views brought forth in his articles were reinforced in poetical form. “Not with a human plough/

²⁴³ Ivanov, “Vselenskoe delo”, p. 101.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁴⁶ Ivanov, “Rossiia, Angliia i Aziia”.

²⁴⁷ Ivanov, “Vselenskoe delo”, p. 106.

²⁴⁸ “Chestvovanie V.Ia. Briusova”, p. 39.

²⁴⁹ Quoted in Tsekhnovitser, p. 125.

²⁵⁰ Quoted in West, p. 51.

is the world henceforth ploughed over" ("Ne chelovecheskim plugom/ Mir perepakhan otnyne"), it is said in "Whitened Crops" ("Ubelennye nivy", 1914).²⁵¹ With a Biblical reference (John 4:35), Ivanov asserted that the time of harvest, the moment when people would embrace each other in "sobornost' euphoria", would soon arrive. What was demanded was faith: "Firmly hope and believe,/ that the unprecedented will occur." ("Krepko nadeisia, i verui,/ chto nebyvaloe budet.")²⁵² Ultimately Bellona, the Roman goddess of war, would be defeated, and the command "Rust, swords!" ("Rzhav'te, mechi!") be uttered ("Finis Bellonae", 1915).²⁵³

The visions conveyed were intended to inspire his readers, but even so Ivanov refrained from simplifying his poetic language and stuck to his elevated, majestic tone and abundant use of archaisms and ambiguous metaphors. Russia's task was to defeat the "lies of the isolated good" and confirm the triumph of the universal community, the "Truth of God" ("Neduguiushchim", 1914).²⁵⁴ As a "God-bearing people" Russians could count on divine assistance. Ivanov asks the intelligentsia, "the Russian consciousness", to overcome its hesitation and fears and side with the people in a righteous war.²⁵⁵ In "The Judgement" ("Sud", 1915) a divine "wall of defence" is raised by the three commanders in white riding on white horses whom the enemy perceives in front of the Russian army, humbly going to perform their historic deeds.²⁵⁶

When inspired by concrete events, Ivanov also wrote religious and purely symbolist poetry. Out of the conquest of the Galician fortress of Przemyśl in March 1915, two poems, "Praise" ("Khvala") and "Peremyshl", were born.²⁵⁷ Przemyśl was a divine promise of a "spring" that would soon turn into a

251 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 26 ("Ubelennye nivy"). First publ. in *Otechestvo* 7 (1914).

252 *Ibid.*

253 *Ibid.*, p. 29 ("Finis Bellonae"). First publ. in *Klich* (1915), p. 20.

254 *Ibid.*, p. 25 ("Neduguiushchim"). First publ. in *Otechestvo* 6 (1914), p. 101.

255 Khenrik Baran, "Pervaia mirovaia voina v stikhakh Viacheslava Ivanova", in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Materialy i issledovaniia* (Moskva, 1996), p. 173.

256 *Ibid.*, pp. 22-3 ("Sud"). First publ. in *Apollon* 1 (1915), pp. 1-2.

257 The dating of the two poems is confusing. In *Otechestvo* 11 (1915) ("Khvala") and *Russkoe slovo* 22.3.1915 67 ("Peremyshl") the poems are both dated 9 March, while the manuscripts carry the inscription "on 8" and "on 10 March", respectively (*Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 35). Apparently Ivanov is stressing the dates celebrated in the poems and not the dates of writing: 8 March was the day of a decisive victory, 9 March the day of the Austrian surrender and 10 March the date when the Russian newspapers published the news. This was the first day after the victory and thus potentially the beginning of a new historical epoch.

“Blessed Summer” (“Peremyshl”).²⁵⁸ This tendency to search for a mystical correspondence between military events and the seasons, or the feasts of the Church year, was strong in Russian “war literature” right up to the October revolution, and Ivanov was no exception in interpreting spring as a promise of victory and Easter as a reminder of the wonder of resurrection. The significance of the conquest of Przemyśl was for him not only national, but universal. It was to form the beginning of the anticipated, truly Christian epoch: “The Earth is saved through a victory” (“Zemlia pobedoi spasena”).²⁵⁹ The significance of the military victory was that God’s will was being fulfilled in Russia (“Khvala”). As Russia, according to Ivanov, was in the service of the whole of humankind and the universal process, these poems cannot be called patriotic in a traditional sense, even if they celebrated Russian victories and conveyed a belief in Russia’s exclusiveness.

Fedor Sologub: East Against West

The imperialistic politics of the European Great Powers are generally considered to be one of the main factors behind the First World War. Fedor Sologub shared this opinion, but only as far as Germany was concerned. Germany needed more space for its people and new markets for its industrial products and it was prepared to wage a war in order to realize these aims. This is something that the majority of Sologub’s German characters, from the Emperor Wilhelm II (“Vil’gel’m Vtoroi”) to the fictional school-inspector Adolf Weller (“Den’ vstrech”), overtly confess. Their dreams of conquest may concern different geographical regions, but one thing they all agree upon: Germany needs the soil of the Slavs, the plains of Russia right up to the Urals.²⁶⁰ The German *Drang nach Osten* was according to Sologub a central issue of the war.

Sologub did not have any principled objections to imperialism and colonialism. As we have seen, he chose an ivory tradesman from the Congo as a representative of peace-loving Belgian citizens (“Belgiets”, 1914). In another context he stressed that colonies brought development and prosperity and prevented national introversion.²⁶¹ At the beginning of the century he even proposed that Russia should also join the race for faraway colonies by buying Sumatra from Holland.²⁶² The difference between Russian, English and

²⁵⁸ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 35 (“Peremyshl”).

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35 (“Khvala”).

²⁶⁰ Fedor Sologub, “Mira ne budet”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 30.10.1914 14464.

²⁶¹ Quoted in Tsekhnovitser, pp. 354-5.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 35-7.

Belgian imperialism on the one hand and German imperialism on the other lay in their methods and goals. In their contacts with foreign cultures, the Allied Powers functioned both as a giving and a taking partner, while the German policy was one of suppression, assimilation and annihilation. The Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 was in this respect a turning-point. The victory over France had an intoxicating effect on the national ego and turned Germany into a stronghold of political reaction and militarism. The Germans started to regard themselves as a chosen race of supermen and strove to become stronger than other nations, in order to be able to dictate their will to the world. Only when they had achieved world hegemony, they argued, could the epoch of eternal peace begin.²⁶³

In this process the Russians could not expect any mercy. In Sologub's wartime works Russians are always treated with contempt by Germans. The suspicion harboured by the Slavophiles is shown to be right: Europe looks down upon Russia. The Russians, who admire everything European, must accept being called "swine" and "barbarians"²⁶⁴ by the Germans. Adolf Weller, the school inspector in the short story "Day of Meetings" ("Den' vstrech"), puts it plainly: "the crude and savage Russian people is no more than litter (*podstilka*) for our great German people".²⁶⁵ While Russia was defending its own borders in the war, it was at the same time fighting for its physical survival. A victory for Germany would result in the border being moved to the Urals and the Russians gradually being exterminated.²⁶⁶ This frightening picture was a very real one for Sologub, even in 1917, and was one of the reasons that he advocated a continuation of the war until the very last.

The German thirst for expansion was one explanation for the outbreak of the war, but Sologub did not confine himself to this. To regard the war solely from a political and economic perspective was analogous to the way in which the naturalists which Sologub found obnoxious described reality. Sologub was a symbolist, and as the poem "God against the Attacker" showed, he wanted to go deeper, down to the layer of ideas that was bound to exist behind every external event: "War is the supreme exertion of the energy of the will, one of the most powerful means that Fate uses in order to achieve its faraway goals."²⁶⁷ In a similar way Sologub had in 1904 interpreted the Russo-Japanese war as a

263 Sologub, "Simvolisty o simvolizme: Fedor Sologub".

264 Fedor Sologub, "Vybor orientatsii", *Otechestvo* 6 (1914), p. 104.

265 Sologub, *Iaryi god*, p. 193 ("Den' vstrech").

266 Fedor Sologub, "Do Urala", *Birzhevyye vedomosti* 25.8.1915 15047.

267 Fedor Sologub, "Predislovie", in *Voina v russkoi poezii* (Petrograd, 1915), p. 5.

battle between world-views and morals and not as a struggle for markets and dominance.²⁶⁸

Sologub's central expression for the highest principle of life was the "Fate of the people" or the "single will" (*edinaia volia*). The answer to the question of what plans this Fate or Will had for the war, Sologub found in Slavophilism. His journalism reveals that he was well versed both in Slavophilism and in recent attempts to infuse new life into its central theses. Together with Ivanov, Sologub stands out as one of the most consistent neo-Slavophiles among Russian writers. The world is divided into East and West, he stated in the article "A Choice of Orientation" ("Vybor orientatsii") in December 1914. The two categories were not primarily geographical, but metaphysical. The East stood for spirituality, mysticism and religious feeling, with Christ, Buddha, Confucius and Plato as its purest representatives,²⁶⁹ while the West was Antichrist and its ideology was materialism, the "cult of things".²⁷⁰ In the war these two incompatible forces faced each other like David and Goliath: the "delicate force of spiritual culture" against the "crude mass of material culture".²⁷¹ The opposition was the same as the one Sologub had referred to in "God against the Attacker": against the armoured might of the foe stood a Russia dressed in God's armour, or, in other words, this was a battle of the spirit against matter. The most genuine national symbol of the East was Russia, while Germany was the embodiment of the West. The struggle between Russia and Germany was in this way elevated to form the crux of the war. It was on the Eastern front that the course of world history would be determined.

A seemingly difficult question for those who wanted to bring life to the concept of Slavophilism was why Europe had not formed a united front against Russia. Sologub solved this problem in the same way as the neo-Slavophile philosophers of his time.²⁷² Some of the European peoples, i.e. those of Eng-

268 Fedor Sologub, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. x (St. Petersburg, [s.a.]), p. 222 ("Zhalost' i liubov").

269 Buddha and Christ had earlier represented two diametrically opposed views of life for Sologub, namely that of life-denial, pity and pessimism against life-affirmation, love and optimism (Johannes Holthusen, *Fedor Sologubs Roman-Trilogie (Tvorimaja legenda): Aus der Geschichte des Russischen Symbolismus* [s-Gravenhage, 1960], pp. 13-4). Now the synthesis that he had dreamed of in connection with the Russo-Japanese war ("Zhalost' i liubov", *Sobr. soch.*, vol. x, p. 222) seemed to have become a reality.

270 Sologub, "Vybor orientatsii", p. 106.

271 Fedor Sologub, "Zhal' Bolgariiu", *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 1.2.1915 14646.

272 See Ben Hellman, "Kogda vremia slavianofil'stvovalo: Russkie filosofy i pervaiia mirovaia voina", in *Studia Russica Helsingiensia et Tartuensia: Problemy istorii russkoi literatury nachala XX veka*. Slavica Helsingiensia 6 (Helsinki, 1989), pp. 211-39.

land and France, had managed to preserve the central traits of civilization and had therefore felt drawn to Russia. The assertion was bold and, in fact, contrary to the view of the Allied Powers. For them underdeveloped, autocratic Russia, with its lack of democracy and respect for human rights, was more of an embarrassment than a positive ideal. But Sologub and other Russian neo-Slavophiles had their own scale of values. They praised the ontological rather than the phenomenal Russia, not the Russian state (*Rossiiia*) but “Holy Russia” (*Rus’*) with all its as yet unfulfilled potential. It was from this position that Sologub graciously accepted France for its heroism, England for its defence of justice, and Belgium for its spirit of self-sacrifice.²⁷³

Sologub sought an explanation for the diverging stages of religious development among the European nations. Christians were fighting Christians in the war, but from a neo-Slavophile point of view this was not an unexpected tragedy, as there was a distinction between true and false Christianity. Catholicism had been the main enemy for the Slavophiles, but altered circumstances drew attention to Protestantism. Protestantism was nothing but a thin layer of rationally interpreted Christianity, Sologub wrote. The Lutheran priests confined themselves to preaching “prudent morality, that which is useful for life”.²⁷⁴ Neither had the great names of German philosophy and literature been able to deepen the religious feeling of the German people. Goethe, Kant and Nietzsche were essentially representatives of a pagan culture and thus had their own share in the barbarization of the German soul. Like the philosopher Vladimir Ern, Sologub chose to draw a straight line “from Kant to Krupp”, equating German culture with militarism.

The Russians and the Germans were essentially different. While “prophetic knowledge and insights” were typical of the Russian soul, the German soul was mechanized and rationalistic.²⁷⁵ Russia was Mary, who sat at the feet of Jesus, thirsting for truth and light and prepared humbly to learn from others, while Germany, on the contrary, was the fussy Martha, always preoccupied with practical concerns.²⁷⁶ Bourgeois respectability, which in Sologub’s eyes had always had the character of a metaphysical evil and which had driven so many of his fictional characters into the realm of dream and death, was fully embodied by Germany. There the spirit was fettered and the strength of the

273 Sologub, “Zhal’ Bol’gariiu”.

274 Sologub, “Mira ne budet”.

275 *Ibid.*

276 Fedor Sologub, “Predislovie”, in *Rossiiia v rodnykh pesniakh: Stikhotvoreniia* (Petrograd, 1915), p. [5].

nation lay only in matter. This was the message of the poem “The Spirit of Berlin” (“Dukh Berlina”):

That, which was the brilliance of intellect
turned into a dull routine
and Germany itself
became a colossal machine.*²⁷⁷

Moulded for centuries by their distorted religion and godless culture, the Germans were predisposed to become brutalized. Their conscience had been killed and their ethical norms watered down. The news that the Allied press carried concerning German acts of cruelty in Poland, Belgium and France seemed to confirm that this really was the case. As these dispatches supported his theories and sanctioned the war from a Russian point of view, Sologub was prepared to believe in them unreservedly. Both in his articles and in his works of fiction, as for example in the short novel *The Edge of the Sword* (*Ostrië mecha*, 1915) and the poems “To a Boy Scout” (“Boi-skoutu”), “To My Brothers” (“Brat’iam”), “Henrietta” (“Genrieta”) and “A dark day is dawning...” (“Vstanet temnyi den’...”), he put much energy into trying to convince others, too, that these stories were not just examples of Russian propaganda, but truthful descriptions of a cruel reality.

Sologub was guided by the notion of a “civilized war”. The view that cruelty formed an inseparable part of war he regarded as both cynical and slanderous, as it might also be applied to the Russian army.²⁷⁸ Like the other neo-Slavophiles, he made a sharp distinction between his own side and the enemy, distinguishing between “genuine warriors” and “wretched barbarians”, between a “self-sacrificing, honest battle” and the “base manifestation of an evil will”.²⁷⁹ The Russians were a scrupulous people, unable even to hate the enemy, and in all situations they displayed an unshakable good-naturedness and magnanimity.²⁸⁰ The Germans were, on the contrary, capable of any form of brutal and infamous action.

The war would not only decide whether Russia was to be politically and economically enslaved and eventually exterminated by Germany, but it would

* “To, chto bylo blesk uma,/ Obleklosia tuskloiu rutinoui,/ I Germaniia sama/ Stala kolossal’noi mashinoui.”

277 Sologub, *Voina*, p. 16 (“Dukh Berlina”). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 7.12.1914 14540.

278 Fedor Sologub, “Sud liudskoi”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 7.5.1915 14829.

279 *Ibid.*

280 *Ibid.* See also “Predislovie”, in *Voina v russkoi poezii*, pp. 5-6.

also show which doctrine – that of the West or of the East – was to dominate Europe. However, the final solution to this crucial question would only be decided in the distant future. Sologub did not share the popular belief that the present war was a war to end wars, the last big war of history, but saw it as the beginning of a long period of wars against Germany:

We have entered the period of a decisive battle for our national self-assertion, for our very right to exist. In a fateful way we are forced not only to win, but also to crush Germany, since without this we cannot exist. A powerful Germany next to us will always encroach on our economic and spiritual independence.²⁸¹

An urgent task for Russia was to define and manifest its national individuality. Its calling was to symbolize the East, basing its culture on the “mystical view of the world” associated with the East.²⁸² By defeating Germany and freeing itself from pernicious Western influences, Russia would after a thousand-year period of apprenticeship be able to utter its “Word” to the world.²⁸³ The universal cast of the Russian character made it particularly suited for a Messianic task. “The spirit of the Russian soul is to cultivate and preserve humanity’s central commandments (...)”, Sologub wrote with an implicit reference to Dostoevskii’s famous Pushkin speech.²⁸⁴ Russia had been chosen to become a spiritual great power, which would play a decisive role in the future. This insight should not prompt only pride, but also humility in the face of the huge responsibility it involved.²⁸⁵

A stay on the Upper Volga in the summer of 1915 aroused in Sologub a curious idea of how Russia could mark the fact that a new stage in its history had begun. He proposed as the new capital of Russia Iaroslavl’, one of the oldest towns in Russia.²⁸⁶ It was situated in what Sologub regarded as the genuine Russia, and, moreover, in 1612, when Moscow was occupied by the Poles, it had already functioned as the capital. Making Iaroslavl’ capital of Russia also

²⁸¹ Sologub, “Mira ne budet”.

²⁸² Sologub, “Vybor orientatsii”.

²⁸³ Sologub, “Mira ne budet”; Fedor Sologub, “Mirovaia gromada”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 28.1.1915 14638.

²⁸⁴ Sologub, “Predislovie”, in *Rossia v rodnikh pesniakh*, p. [6].

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. [6].

²⁸⁶ Fedor Sologub, “Po shirokomu razdol’iu”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 21.6.1915 14917; Fedor Sologub, “Bodraia sladost’”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 30.6.1915 14935.

meant going eastward, away from St. Petersburg, the foreign body in the Russian empire, and closer to the East and the sources of wisdom. In the heart of Russia indulgence in everything European had not yet defeated love of one's own national culture.²⁸⁷

Another symbol of a new historical epoch was a Russian Constantinople, Tsar'grad. The question of Russia as the heir to Byzantium was closely connected with Russia's role among the Slavonic peoples. In a larger perspective Sologub saw the war, the treachery of Bulgaria notwithstanding, as a struggle of the Slavs against the Germanic peoples. When a Serbian day was celebrated in Petrograd in January 1915, Sologub published the poem "Petrograd-Belgrad", a straightforward defence of the Pan-Slavic utopia:

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We will build a majestic hall,
Our third and last Rome.
With new glory we will illuminate
Slavdom there in brotherly union!

Greet the solemn dawns
and, together with your brothers, pray
that in the deep Russian sea
all the rivers of Slavia will merge!...^{*288}

Sologub appealed to Slavonic feelings of brotherly love, but made it clear that "Slaviia", the future make-up of which he did not specify, would be hierarchical, with Russia at the top. The active "we" of the poem are the Russians; the other Slavs have to content themselves with basking in the reflected glory of Russia. Russia is the ocean, while the other nations are rivers, which, governed by the laws of nature, discharge themselves into this sea. A Russian reader would have recognized the allusion to Pushkin's "To Those who Slander Russia" ("Klevetnikam Rossii", 1831), where, in connection with the Russian suppression of the Polish uprising the following questions were said to be at stake: "Will the Slavonic streams merge in the Russian sea? / Will it dry up, that's the

287 Fedor Sologub, "V strane khleba i zdorov'ia: II", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 12.10.1915 15143.

* "Chertog my stroim velichaviy, / Nash tretii i poslednii Rim. / My v nem slavianstvo novoi slavoi / V soiuze bratskom ozarim! // Vstrechai torzhestvennye zori, / I vmeste s brat'iami molis', / Chtoby v glubokom russkom more / Vse reki Slavii slilis'!.."

288 Fedor Sologub, "Petrograd-Belgrad", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 24.1.1915 14630.

question.” (“Slavianskie l’ ruch’i sol’iutsia v russkom more?/ Ono l’ issiaknet? vot vopros.”)²⁸⁹ Now the time was ripe for a positive answer to the first question. The basis of Russia’s claim to leadership had, as Sologub reminds us in his poem, already been uttered in the 16th century: Russia was called upon to be the “third Rome”, the new centre of Christianity. The realization of this dream would have great consequences for all Slavonic peoples, and the poem “Petrograd – Belgrad” was an appeal to them to seize the historical opportunity that the World War offered.

The World War was an ordeal not only for Russia, but for all humankind. Germany was the “new Attila”,²⁹⁰ a ravaging barbarian, but its evil also had metaphysical dimensions, as Sologub pointed out by naming it the “wild dragon”²⁹¹ and Satan.²⁹² In the shape of Germany, matter revolted against the spirit, the machine against man. But the human spirit would triumph over the machine and pass through the difficulties unharmed.²⁹³ Behind the course of events was the “wisdom of history”, which would lead man to a bright future.²⁹⁴ This historical optimism was a new feature in Sologub. Earlier, the gateway to perfect beauty and eternity had led to the revered Kingdom of Death,²⁹⁵ but now an earthly paradise was promised at the end of humankind’s historical road.

Through Russia the light of salvation would shine from the “mystical East”.²⁹⁶ Paradoxically, even England was given an important function in this respect. Of all the West European nations, England was the one with the closest connections to the “mystical revelations of the ancient East”.²⁹⁷ Behind this cryptic formulation lay the fact that the British Empire, just like the Russian Empire, included parts of Asia, where the English people had come into contact with eastern religions and philosophies. Sologub did not see any reason to moralize about the British presence in China and India, but regarded this involvement as a natural outlet for a “nomadic instinct”, a “thirst for the great

289 A.S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, vol. III (Moscow, 1957), p. 222 (“Klevetnikam Rossii”).

290 Sologub, *Voina*, p. 8 (“Marsh”). First publ. in *Den’* 7.8.1914 211.

291 *Ibid.*, p. 9 (“Edinenie plemen”).

292 *Ibid.*, p. 18 (“Pobezhdaite”). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 30.11.1914 14526

293 Fedor Sologub, “U nog Kolossa”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 21.3.1915 14740.

294 Fedor Sologub, “Sneg”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 10.2.1915 14662.

295 Leitner, p. 63.

296 Sologub, “Mira ne budet”.

297 Sologub, “Mirovaia gromada”.

expanses of the world” that the British had in common with the Russians. “To remain within their boundaries seems too narrow and boring to them, and they must have more land (...),” Sologub wrote with sympathy, when this basically imperialistic drive concerned England and not Germany.²⁹⁸

Sologub's benevolent attitude to the British Empire is shared by the Indian soldier in the dramatic monologue “A Hindu Warrior” (“Indusskii voïn”, 1915). The Indian says with pride:

My emperor, an Englishman,
lives in a distant, northern land.
For him I have been wounded in the fight,
and for him I shall again shed blood.*²⁹⁹

By fighting on the side of the British, the Indian becomes part of the progressive forces of world history.

In the long view, the alliance between Russia and Britain would lead to a unification of the nations of the world “under the banner of the true, spiritual culture of the mystical East”. A first step was to unite the “peace-loving and truly cultural people of India, China, Japan” into a single empire under the aegis of Russia and England. This utopia was peculiar to Sologub alone. No trace remained of the fear of the “Yellow peril”, which was still so powerful in Ivanov, Belyi and Blok, and which had also left its mark upon Sologub's own *A Legend in the Making*.³⁰⁰ Even the old enemy, Japan, was turned into a peaceful part of the East. Russia no longer had the function of a bulwark between Asia and Europe, as in Blok's poem “The Scythians” (“Skify”, 1918), but instead it constitutes a link which unites the two parts of the world. Together with India, China and Japan, Russia forms the “mystical East”, and the utopia would be implemented when these nations finally found each other and the German danger was averted once and for all. At this point “the tormented earth will receive its final freedom and a blessed peace”.³⁰¹

Slavophilism was new for Sologub, but a favourable breeding ground for its ideas existed from earlier times, as his thinking tended to be based on abstrac-

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

* “Moi imperator, anglichanin,/ Zhivet v dalekom, severnom kraiu./ Ia za nego v srazhen'ii ranen,/ I za nego ia snova krov' prol'iu.”

²⁹⁹ Fedor Sologub, *Alyi mak: Kniga stikhov* (Moscow, 1917), p. 201 (“Indusskii voïn”).

³⁰⁰ Holthusen, pp. 64-5.

³⁰¹ Sologub, “Mirovaia gromada”.

tions and schematization. The broad generalizations and the sharp division between “we” and “they”, typical of Slavophilism, corresponded to the duality in Sologub’s early philosophy of life, that is the dichotomy between dream and reality, art and life, but above all between good and evil.³⁰² The struggle between demonic and heavenly forces, between depravity and innocence was now depicted in the shape of warring nations. If evil had earlier manifested itself in everyday Russian reality, in the stifling atmosphere and vacuous life of the provincial towns, it was now transferred to Germany.

It was obvious that Sologub’s views were dictated by the shifting front lines of the war and not by subjective experience. There is no general animosity towards Germans in his pre-war works. Sologub knew Germany fairly well, both geographically and culturally, but even so, similarly to Ivanov, he appears to have been completely unaware of a “German danger” before 1914. At the outbreak of the war his emotional response was that Germany was evil incarnate, and neo-Slavophilism helped him to give this spontaneously aggressive response a theoretical basis. His former blindness became ever-increasing proof of the wiliness of German infiltration in times of peace. There is also a hint of repentance in Sologub’s strong emotional involvement in the war: with his radical and impetuous statements he was atoning for an earlier leaning towards decadence and an indifference to national questions.

What Sologub had lacked was a feeling for history, indeed the term “anti-historicism” has been used to characterize his early writings.³⁰³ The grandiose Slavophile philosophy of history filled this void only too well. It offered him the basis for an affirmative attitude to life, which, according to Sologub himself, was most imperative for artistic creation.³⁰⁴ Here also were the “beautiful ideals”, in accordance with which life could be reshaped and which it was one’s artistic duty to support with faith and creative will. Sologub attached a decisive importance to spiritual power, and thus also to the craft of writers in the war. His confidence in victory, which was expressed in the poem “God against the Attacker”, was as much an act of will on Sologub’s side as a prediction. In the poem “Fortune-telling” (“Gadanie”) he wrote:

As soon as the heart beats true,
all earthly storms are smoke;

³⁰² Stanley J. Rabinowitz, *Sologub’s Literary Children: Keys to a Symbolist’s Prose* (Columbus, Ohio, 1980), pp. 23 ff.

³⁰³ Dikman, p. 39.

³⁰⁴ Sologub, “Simvolisty o simvolizme”, p. 77.

everything will be just like we want,
we just have to wish immensely.*³⁰⁵

If you believed in Russia and desired victory, then Russia would be victorious, and an important step towards the implementation of a neo-Slavophile utopia would have been taken.

Valerii Briusov: Slavs Against Germans

At the end of the banquet arranged by the Moscow Literature and Art Circle in the summer of 1914, Briusov proposed a toast “to culture, to justice, to the spiritual values in whose name we are called to fight” and urged the audience to believe in victory over the “German fist”.³⁰⁶ The picture of the war as a struggle between the German and Slavonic peoples, where the former stood for blind violence and the latter for an elevated spirituality, was simple and inspiring. But when Briusov wrote an article for the Moscow Circle’s internal journal two days later, he found it important also to recall the dark side of war:

Under certain circumstances war is a great thing and the ultimate argument in universal controversies, where the side which is right is not always strong by right alone. But war is all the same the bitter evil of the earth, a calamity for the people. After all, the results of war are brutalization (*odichanie*) and coarsening of customs, the highest ideals are forgotten, and the cultural level drops.³⁰⁷

Lines like these could hardly have escaped the red pencil of the censors if intended for publication in *Russkie vedomosti*, but in a small club journal they could be printed. They revealed that Briusov neither shared Sologub’s theory about the ennobling influence of the war, nor nurtured the idealistic belief that a just cause is always crowned with victory. The article has been seen as an attempt on Briusov’s side to calm down the supposed warmongers among Moscow writers and artists,³⁰⁸ but considering the context and the forum of

* “Lish’ tol’ko serdtse b’etsia verno,/ A vse zemnye buri – dym;/ Vse budet tak, kak my khotim,/ Lish’ stoit zakhotet’ bezmerno.”

³⁰⁵ Sologub, *Alyi mak*, p. 229 (“Gadanie”).

³⁰⁶ Valerii Briusov v *avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh*..., p. 321.

³⁰⁷ Valerii Briusov, “[26 iuliia 1914 g.]”, *Izvestiia Moskovskogo literaturno-khudozhestvennogo kruzhka* 7 (1914), p. 2.

³⁰⁸ Derbenev, p. 179.

the publication, it appears that Briusov simply felt it urgent to stress the continuing importance of the cultural work that the Moscow Circle was carrying on during the war. He had certainly not composed a pacifist appeal. He never expressed much concern for human life, and, furthermore, he definitely assigned the present war to the category of “great things”, as all the necessary “circumstances” appeared to be present.

While waiting for permission to leave for Poland, Briusov composed a cycle of topical poems, which in addition to “The Last War”, discussed above, included “Our Days” (“Nashi dni”), “An Old Question” (“Staryi vopros”), “To Poland” (“Pol’she”) and “To the Flemish” (“Flamandtsam”). It is striking that none of these poems, even if they were written under the fresh impression of shocking news, can be classed as patriotic. The words “Russia” and “Russian” did not belong in Briusov’s main poetic vocabulary, but from the outset he tried to discern the great patterns in the war. When he is geographically concrete, his gaze is usually turned away from the borders of Russia.

The stance of the “witness of sublime views”, the enraptured but neutral observer, that Briusov had adopted in “The Last War”, is repeated here. At a certain distance, it was easier to discern the gigantic scale. Two lines from “Our Days” – “Are not swords and helmets gleaming/ above the shafts of clanking rails?” (“Ne bleshchut li mechi i shlemy/ Nad strelami zveniyashchikh rel’s?”)³⁰⁹ – convinced Vladimir Maiakovskii that Briusov and the symbolists in general lacked words for dealing with the modern war. In his eyes these were “the words of a grey-bearded witness from the crusades”.³¹⁰ But it was precisely Briusov’s wish to erase border lines and show how not only the past and the present, but also the future merged in the present war. The same kind of courage as in the battles of the Middle Ages was to be found in the present war, but also technical equipment of a kind that only writers of science fiction had foreseen.

Two later poems in the same category, “Circles On the Water” (“Krugi na vode”) and “The Western Front” (“Zapadnyi front”), concentrated upon the extension of the war not in time but in space. The effects of the war are spreading all over the world, it is said in “Circles on the Water”. In spite of an emotional opening that has been seen as proof of Briusov’s “humanistic position”³¹¹ – “One people transmits to another/ the accursed slogan: ‘We are enemies!’”

309 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 11, p. 142 (“Nashi dni”). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl’* 8-9 (1914), p. 244.

310 Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1955), p. 327 (“Voina i iazyk”).

311 N.S. Burlakov, *Valerii Briusov: Ocherk tvorchestvo* (Moscow, 1975), p. 167.

("Narod peredaet narodu/ Prokliaty lozung: 'my – vragi!'")³¹² – the human aspect is soon lost. Instead there is a fascination with the very dimensions of the war and also the "Hun's" detached observation of how holiness is desecrated and virginity deflowered. "The Western Front" is turned into a similar "catalogue poem", where the reader waits in vain for an authorial comment in the last stanza, which would sum up all the facts. Briusov follows the battle line from the Alps to the English Channel and notes traces of the war, like corpses of soldiers, blood, crosses, the sound of cannon and exploding grenades, and the devastated landscape. The battle line is compared to a road, but where the road usually functions as a link between people, this is a "road of hatred and curses" ("stala dorogoi vrazhdy i proklatii").³¹³ The metaphor, however, rather gives the impression of something more worked out than genuinely felt, and "The Western Front" does not grow into a genuinely philosophical poem.

"The grandiosity, the majesty of the war, its scale, in other words its 'quantitative side' were the features that attracted Briusov's attention in the first place", Dmitrii Maksimov rightly observes.³¹⁴ With his attention focussed on the quantitative aspects of the war, it was difficult for Briusov, in spite of his many trips to the war-ridden territories, to perceive individual fates. Nevertheless, he attached great importance to rumours and evidence of savagery and deceitfulness by the enemy, and on the basis of these observations, he divided the warring nationalities in his reports into two distinct camps, the good and the bad, we and they. The first terrifying reports of "German cruelty" concerned the civilians of East Prussia. Russian officers who had participated in the first offensive on enemy ground were shocked at the "racial hatred" that they had met on the German side of the border. In the territory that the Russian army briefly occupied, the civilians had not remained neutral, but launched a merciless partisan war against the invaders.³¹⁵ According to the Geneva Convention, the civilian population should not be touched during a war. This presupposed that civilians did not participate in actual fighting. In the First World War the issue became problematic, especially in Belgium, where resistance against the German occupation resulted in acts of violence by both sides gradually increasing, with tragic results. What Briusov did not observe was his own double standard of morality. He noted Polish animosity

312 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 11, p. 143 ("Krugi na vode"). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl'* 1 (1915), p. 162.

313 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 11, p. 156 ("Zapadnyi front"). First publ. in *Russkie vedomosti* 17.12.1914 290.

314 Maksimov, *Briusov*, p. 210.

315 Valerii Briusov, "Poltorasta verst po Vostochnoi Prussii", *Russkie vedomosti* 30.8.1914 199.

towards the Germans with satisfaction, as when he heard a poem in a Polish theatre in Vilnius, in which the last lines of every stanza expressed an irreconcilable hatred towards the Germans: "As holy is holy,/ a Prussian will never be a brother for a Slav!"³¹⁶ Briusov was upset by the "racial hatred" of the Germans in East Prussia. In August 1914, he expressed his indignation at a Prussian landowner, who after having received some Russian soldiers kindly sent his servant to lead them deliberately astray;³¹⁷ but when a similar incident took place during the German retreat from Warsaw a month later, Briusov interpreted the same behaviour as proof of Polish patriotism and heroism. German soldiers had forced a Jewish boy to function as their guide, but the boy led them straight to the Russian troops. Some of the Germans were taken prisoners, others shot dead, and in revenge the soldiers killed their unreliable guide.³¹⁸ Briusov presumably wanted to see these incidents as revealing a decisive difference between the two national characters. While the Russians could not be provoked to raise their hands against civilians, the Germans did not hesitate brutally to kill even women and children, in order to scare the civilian population into passivity. It was the same assumption that Sologub, Merezhkovskii and Gippius were also to make, though in Briusov's case it was presented in "documentary" form.

From the Western parts of Poland there came rumours about acts of cruelty and vandalism committed by the invading German army. In November 1914 Briusov was in Brzeziny, a town that had repeatedly been captured by the Germans, and he heard hair-raising stories from the local population about the behaviour of the occupiers.³¹⁹ Briusov saw its systematic character as the typical feature of the German policy of devastation. Even the raping of women was said to take place in a planned way.³²⁰ Other incidents revealed "perverse feelings, something pathological",³²¹ as when soldiers would use the libraries of manor-houses as toilets, or churches were turned into kitchens, or dining-rooms, or even into stables for horses. The Germans also used what Briusov called "unworthy tricks" in battle. In October the white flag had been misused outside Warsaw, and Russian Red Cross cars had come under fire. According

316 Valerii Briusov, "V Vil'ne", *Russkie vedomosti* 21.8.1914 191.

317 Briusov, "Poltorasta verst po Vostochnoi Prussii".

318 V[alerii] B[riusov], "Posle pobedy. Na poliakh bitv pod Varshavoi: III", *Russkie vedomosti* 17.10.1914 239.

319 Valerii Briusov, "Noch v mertvom gorode", *Russkie vedomosti* 5.12.1914 280.

320 Briusov, "Iz Varshavy v Iaroslav: II. V razorennoi strane", *Russkie vedomosti* 25.9.1914 220.

321 Briusov, "Na severnom fronte".

to Briusov, Russian officers and soldiers talked about cases like these as something evident and fully proven.³²² Another “infamous act” of the Germans was the bombing of Warsaw in the autumn of 1914. Planes had not been used in earlier wars, and many Russian soldiers looked upon the use of aircraft as something dishonest. Briusov accepted the use of planes for reconnaissance, air battles and attacks on purely military targets. During the siege of Przemyśl Russian pilots had reportedly shown that such attacks were possible. To attack unarmed civilians from the air was, however, something that “even Zulus” would refrain from doing. Imprisonment was a punishment too mild for these “bandits”, the usually so composed Briusov exclaimed.³²³

The German pilots, who had bombed the Polish capital, were also branded in a poem, “Aeroplanes Over Warsaw” (“Aeroplany nad Varshavoi”). Briusov could no longer feel pure fascination at the thought of how the World War had conquered all the elements, but saw it now as a defeat of man. The same process of profanation is described in “To the Steel Birds” (“K stal’nym ptitsam”), Briusov’s 1916 contribution to an English anthology, *The Soul of Russia*. The invention of the aeroplane had been a victory for humankind, and as such Briusov had celebrated it in an earlier poem, “To Someone” (“Komu-to”, 1908), but instead of bringing people closer to one another, the planes – and expressly German planes – were now used for destruction and the slaughter of civilians:

Not to honorable battle beneath the clouds
are they hastening, urging on their flight,
but at midnight, as unseen enemies,
on women and old men they hurl
their fire down from above!*³²⁴

In May 1915, shortly before his departure from Poland, Briusov took his final opportunity to confirm the rumours about enemy brutality. Russian soldiers who had participated in the defense of the Lithuanian town Siauliai told stories about an army which had behaved like a pack of wolves. Wounded enemy

322 Valerii Briusov, “Posle pobedy. Na poliakh bitv pod Varshavoi: II. Osnova nashikh pobed”, *Russkie vedomosti* 16.10.1914 238.

323 Valerii Briusov, “Nemtsy pod Varshavoi”, *Russkie vedomosti* 11.10.1914 234.

* “Ne v chestnyi boi pod oblakami/ Oni, spesha, stremiat polet,/ No v polnoch’, tainymi vragami,/ Nad zhenshchinami, starikami/ Svergaiut svoi ogon’ s vysot!”

324 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 349 (“K stal’nym ptitsam”). The English translation, “The Steel Birds”, was published in *The Soul of Russia* (London, 1916), pp. 219–20.

soldiers had been killed, the Red Cross had been the target of systematic firing, forbidden explosive bullets and saw-toothed bayonets had been used. The town had been razed to the ground and its population had fled in panic. The Russian soldier, by nature kind and generous, was now full of hatred and feelings of revenge.³²⁵

Briusov was aware that rumours followed in war's footsteps, but according to him enough indisputable facts were already available by the spring of 1915 to have Germany branded as a "country of dragons and basilisks".³²⁶ In the end one had to believe what one did not want to believe: "German cruelty" was not just a propaganda term, but a terrible reality. The German officer and soldier were barbarians, capable of anything.³²⁷ As a war correspondent, Briusov had more right to talk about German savagery than the other Russian symbolists, but in the end his examples and conclusions did not differ much from, say, those of Sologub. It was a common tendency to view acts of cruelty not as the very essence of war, but as shocking crimes against written and unwritten rules, a challenge to an idealistic image of war. Instead of being seen as revelations of human nature, the barbarity was felt to unmask national traits.

The Russian people had never been a riddle for Briusov, as it had previously simply not existed for him as a collective entity. Faithful to his symbolist programme, he had concentrated on analyzing his own inner world, or, as during the 1905 revolution, devoted himself to speculations concerning world history, with little if any anchorage in social realities. Briusov's encounter with the people in the war had no dramatic outcome. His characterization of the Russian soldier is, to be true, positive throughout, but even so the overall tone is strikingly moderate. Excessive heroizing or mythologizing of his own people remained foreign to Briusov.

As typical traits of the Russian soldiers, Briusov singled out cheerfulness and an unshakable firmness.³²⁸ They went into battle with serious and concentrated expressions on their faces, showing no trace of anxiety or excitement. The soldiers whom Briusov met in Lublin in September 1914 were kind and playful in spite of the critical situation. Outside Warsaw in October, it was the Russians' courage and endurance that stopped the German army,³²⁹ and in December their "calm cheerfulness, their courage, not blind, but conscious",

325 Valerii Briusov, "Mimokhodom: XI. Vesti iz-pod Shavlei", *Russkie vedomosti* 17.5.1915 112.

326 Valerii Briusov, "Strana drakonov i vasiliskov", *Russkie vedomosti* 13.5.1915 108.

327 Briusov, "Na severnom fronte"; Briusov, "Noch' v mertvom gorode".

328 Briusov, "Posle pobedy: I. Pole bitvy".

329 Briusov, "Posle pobedy. Na poliax bitv pod Varshavoi: II. Osnova nashikh pobed".

stood out against the powerful fanaticism of the enemy in Western Poland.³³⁰ Faced with the enemy everyone was equal. The soldiers trusted in their officers, and everyone realized the importance of the war and was prepared to give his life for victory.³³¹ Everywhere Briusov met an unbending force which overpowered all doubts. No enemy is invincible, if such a spirit reigns in the army, he concluded in December 1914.³³²

The Russian army was the collective hero of the World War, but Briusov also took an interest in individual feats. He had always been fascinated by the heroic deed as such, but whereas his examples had formerly been taken from history, he now found them among the soldiers and officers of the Russian army. An unarmed hero whom he associated with historical figures and characters from classical antiquity was Porfirii Panasiuk, a non-commissioned officer whom he met at a hospital in Warsaw in April 1915. Panasiuk had worked as a scout on the North-West Front, when he was detected by the enemy. He refused to talk even under torture, managed to escape and was rewarded with promotion and the St. George Cross.³³³ In the eyes of Briusov this was a heroic feat, performed by a simple Russian peasant soldier, who combined intelligence with physical strength. The example of Panasiuk also served to stress the difference between “us” and “them”, as by his actions he had defended the “dignity of a Russian among Germans, who had revealed the whole extent of their barbarity under a thin layer of culture”.³³⁴

If Panasiuk was noteworthy because of his courage and endurance, the war also brought forth another kind of hero. Despite his criticism of the Germans’ blind faith in technology, Briusov himself took a great interest in all the latest technical developments. Briusov devoted much attention to a certain staff officer Gurdov, the very embodiment of the writer’s love for the exotic.³³⁵ Gurdov,

330 Valerii Briusov, “Kluby dyma”, *Russkie vedomosti* 12.12.1914 286.

331 Valerii Briusov, “Poezdka v Pultusk”, *Russkie vedomosti* 13.9.1914 210.

332 Valerii Briusov, “Mimokhodom: II. Na pitatel’nom punkte. III. V Plotskoi gubernii”, *Russkie vedomosti* 17.12.1914 290.

333 The Soviet literary critic Orest Tsekhovitsker (p. 178) decided twenty years later that Panasiuk’s story was *a priori* false and that in reality he had mutilated himself in order to get away from the front. Without stating his sources, Tsekhovitsker claimed that rumours of this kind had already been circulating during the World War but that they had been rejected by Briusov.

334 Valerii Briusov, “Mimokhodom: X. Porfirii Panasiuk”, *Russkie vedomosti* 9.4.1915 80.

335 Briusov devoted three articles to Gurdov: “Mimokhodom. IV. Odin iz geroev”, *Russkie vedomosti* 28.12.1914 298; “Shtabs-kapitan Gurdov”, *Russkie vedomosti* 20.2.1915 41; and “Pamiati mechtatelia: Nove dannye iz zhizni shtabs-kapitana Gurdova”, *Russkie vedomosti* 10.3.1915 56.

a pioneer in the use of motor vehicles in war, topped the newspaper headlines for the first time in September 1914, when he was commanding a division of armoured cars in a battle near Łódź. Briusov met him in Warsaw in December. Three months later Gurdov was killed near Przasnysz, when he was leading the way for the Russian artillery in his armoured car. Briusov was above all fascinated by Gurdov's psyche. Gurdov was a dreamer with a strong bent for unusual adventures and dangerous situations. He was a deeply religious fatalist, and when facing danger he showed calm courage. The traits of a good warrior were combined with modern technology. Gurdov dreamed of changing war completely, replacing man with machines. He was interested in bombers, wrote theoretical works about submarine war, and developed a new kind of armoured car, a prototype of the tank. Briusov, a devotee of science fiction, found in Gurdov a hero who was already living in the future.

On the German side, technology was on the contrary in the hands of barbarians who stopped at nothing. Turning his earlier fascination with destruction into a defence of the products of human endeavour, Briusov branded the enemy in the poem "To the Teuton" ("Tevtonu") for firing at the cathedrals of Paris and Reims. Instead of searching for a religious meaning for the events, Briusov attached importance to the creative work, the products of European culture, a trait which would eventually grow stronger.³³⁶

The poem "Germany" ("Germaniia") was planned as Briusov's most elaborate poetic comment about Germany. But the writer interrupted his work and rejected the poem as bad,³³⁷ and as a result "Germany" was published only posthumously and with the subtitle "Fragments" ("Otryvki"). However, there is nothing in the ideological content of the poem that Briusov could suddenly have regretted, the unconventional and risky elements lying rather on the metrical plane. As a metaphor for the German people, Briusov uses a "wild stream", an uncontrollable natural phenomenon, that at regular intervals breaks through its dam and floods the surrounding valleys. Briusov draws a direct line from the Vandals and Attila the Hun to contemporary Germany. He did not accept the Franco-Prussian war as a turning-point, as, according to him, throughout history the Germans had shown aggression towards weak and defenceless people. Outwardly modern Germany gave the impression of being a civilized nation, but the fundamental features of the German character had remained unchanged.

It would have been inconsistent of Briusov to condemn Germany for cherishing imperialistic dreams, as he himself had accepted imperialism as the

336 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 157 ("Tevtonu").

337 *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 610 (comm. to "Germaniia").

great, inspiring idea of the 20th century, and instead he accused the “flood” of threatening the “fertile valleys” of “art, harmony and dream”. Briusov’s choice of terms made the war look like a battle in defence of the values of early Russian symbolism. “Germany” does not end with a tribute to Russian weapons, but instead Briusov expresses a “prophetic hope” (*veshchaia nadezhda*), a well-chosen expression, where the claims of symbolist clairvoyance are immediately cautiously toned down, in a way typical of Briusov. Wisely refraining from the self-confident tone of a Sologub, Briusov expressed only the quiet hope that this time the banks of the lake would hold and Fate – whose intentions Briusov did not set out to interpret – would stop the German assault.³³⁸

Even if in his poetry Briusov strove to be a detached observer, his journalism reveals that he nevertheless nurtured some concrete hopes concerning the future. Important interim goals were the restoration of the old borders of the Kingdom of Poland and the incorporation of Galicia and Constantinople into Russia, all of which would ultimately strengthen the power and political influence of Russia. In the background figured the Pan-Slavic dream that the war would bring the Slavs closer to each other, and their collective impact would thus increase.

On the once again topical question of “East or West?”, Briusov answered evasively in the poem “An Old Question” (“Staryi vopros”), although he expected the war to force Russia to define its relation to Europe more clearly. Two alternatives for Russia’s self-definition are proposed: either the savage horde from the East, or the civilized nation and bulwark against the “Mongols”. Instead of offering a simple answer, Briusov attempts to combine a feeling of national exclusiveness with pride in the alliance with the Western democracies.³³⁹

The war was a battle between the Slavs and the Germans.³⁴⁰ That the Germans were the enemy of all Slavs, Briusov felt even more strongly in Poland, where a centuries-old enmity towards the neighbour had flared up again.³⁴¹ The conflict between the Slavs and the Germans was not only a dispute about territory, but had a universal significance and, indeed, the whole future course of world history depended upon its result. The Slavs were fighting for the whole of mankind, as they were defending the “human principles, culture, law, the freedom of the people”.³⁴² Germany represented not only naked violence,

338 *Ibid.*, pp. 338–9 (“Germaniia”).

339 *Ibid.*, vol. 11, pp. 140–1 (“Staryi vopros”). First publ. in *Russkaia mysl’* 8–9 (1914), p. 242.

340 *Valerii Briusov v avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh...*, p. 321.

341 Valerii Briusov, “Proezdom cherez Varshavu”, *Russkie vedomosti* 26.8.1914 195; Briusov, “Teni”.

342 *Valerii Briusov v avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh...*, p. 321.

but also technology. Briusov did not so much refer to the impressive technical standard of the German army, which he rather admired, as to a highly developed mechanization of the mind. Briusov joined the majority of the symbolists, when claiming that it was automatization, in the shape of Germany, that had revolted in the war against the living human spirit:

Ultimately the struggle of the Russian army against the Prussian invasion is a battle between *a living force and lifeless mechanism*. The Germans put increasing faith in their technology. (...) Against them we put the living human will, that is an army, which is not spurred on by blind discipline and dark hatred, but is inspired by a feeling of duty and a belief in its just cause. This is the guarantee of our success. Man must defeat the machine, the soul the technology.³⁴³

The Dream of Tsar'grad

While the future status of a reunited Poland remained problematical, no secret was made of plans to incorporate Galicia in the west and Constantinople in the south into the Russian empire. Behind these imperialistic goals were not only political and economic motivations, but also historical claims. Galicia was the "Crimson Russia" ("Chervonnaia Rus"), the very heart of the first Russian state formation, and the capture of towns like L'vov and Galich could therefore be viewed as the return of old Russian soil. This opinion was not only voiced by those who watched the events from afar,³⁴⁴ but also by war journalists, like Briusov and Aleksei Tolstoi, who had the possibility of travelling in the occupied territory.

Behind the dream of a Russian conquest of Constantinople lay a long historical tradition. Pushkin based his poem "Oleg's Shield" ("Olegov shchit", 1829) on a legend from the medieval *Nestor Chronicle*. In the early 10th century, Prince Oleg and his soldiers reached Constantinople, but before a decisive victory could be won they were forced to retreat. As a sign of their determination to return, Oleg hung his shield on the city wall, thus leaving a legacy to later Russian rulers. It was the geographical position of Constantinople that gave it such great economic and strategic importance. Whoever possessed the city

343 Briusov, "Na severnom fronte".

344 One of the most blatant expressions of an imperialistic inclination among contemporary Russian writers was Sergei Gorodetskii's *Chetyrnadtsatyi god* (Petrograd, 1915), a volume of poetry, which included a section called "Chervonnaia Rus". Gorodetskii himself did not see front life until 1916.

controlled the Straits that united the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and thus also all trade and shipping that passed through them.

The fall of Constantinople into the hands of the Turks in 1453 added a new dimension to the question. As the capital of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople – or Tsar’grad, as the city had historically been called in Russia – had been the citadel of Christian culture in the East. As the Russian tsars, beginning with Ivan III, assumed the insignia of Byzantium, they also accepted the future task of liberating Constantinople from the infidel. More specifically, they were to liberate the Hagia Sophia, the main cathedral of the Eastern Church that had now been turned into a mosque. A Russian Tsar’grad would be concrete confirmation of the truth of the Russian claim to be heir to the Byzantine Empire and the leader of the Christian world. Religious and political ambitions intertwined in a complicated fashion.

Among writers and ideologists the question of Constantinople received special prominence in the 19th century in connection with Russia’s expansion. Pushkin and Tiutchev wrote poems with an identical title, “Oleg’s shield”, at a time when Russian armies were advancing towards Constantinople during the Greek war of independence. A new attempt to capture the capital of the Ottoman state was made twenty years later during the Crimean War. Literary support was again given by Tiutchev, who had already stated in a pre-war poem that Russia had three capitals, Moscow, Rome and Constantinople (“Russkaia geografia”).³⁴⁵ Tiutchev did not live to see the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war in 1877, but he had an ardent follower in Fedor Dostoevskii. On the eve of the war Dostoevskii wrote in his *The Diary of a Writer* (*Dnevnik pisatel’ia*) the famous words: “Tsargrad must sooner or later be ours!”³⁴⁶ As the spiritual centre of the East, Russia had an indisputable historical right to Constantinople, and the Russian mission of uniting Christianity could only be accomplished from there.³⁴⁷

Turkey entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers in October 1914. In the tsar’s manifesto on the occasion it was stated that Russia would now be able to solve “the historical conflicts that its ancestors have given it on the shores of the Black Sea”. These words were translated into plain language by Sergei Gorodetskii in his poem “Tsar’grad”, published in the same issue of *Birzhevyye vedomosti* as the manifesto. Constantinople was finally to be

345 Tiutchev, p. 152 (“Russkaia geografia”).

346 F.M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, vol. XXIII (Leningrad, 1981), p. 48.

347 *Ibid.*, vol. XXV, p. 74.

liberated and the “impudent half-moon” on the Hagia Sophia to be changed to a cross.³⁴⁸

In an attempt to knock Turkey out of the war and establish a new route along which Russia could be supported with munitions, an Allied fleet and army attacked the Dardanelles and the Gallipoli peninsula from the south in February 1915. Russia did not participate in the military operations, but upon receiving the news about the Allied plans it raised its historical claim to Constantinople and the Straits. A promise to this effect was given by the Allies in April, the first of the secret treaties of the First World War. In Russian political and cultural circles, interest in Constantinople was considerable. Pavel Mil-iukov gave the claim his full support, and so did Russian neo-Slavophiles, like Evgenii Trubetskoi. In literature and the press, the theme of Constantinople was popular all through the spring of 1915. All its different aspects – historical, religious, political, military, and economic – were discussed, but there was also a vivid feeling of allegiance towards an ideological tradition. What the great names of Russian thought had only dreamt of now promised to be fulfilled in reality.

The Galician question had not agitated the symbolists, as the territory had little religious significance, and there was no ideological or literary tradition to fall back on. The sole exception was Briusov, who accepted the propagandist claim that old Slavonic soil was to be returned to its legitimate possessors, and that Slavonic brothers, the Ruthenians, had to be liberated from Austrian oppression.³⁴⁹ After the retreat of the summer 1915, Galicia automatically disappeared from the agenda.

The issue of Constantinople was different. It divided the symbolists into two camps. While Merezhkovskii, Gippius, Bal'mont, Blok and Belyi remained passive, Briusov, Sologub and Ivanov fully supported Russian demands. One problem was that an active campaign for the capture of Tsar'grad contradicted not only Russia's claim to be only defending its own territory in the war, but also the image of the Russian people as devoid of imperialistic inclinations. Merezhkovskii seems to have been aware of the dilemma, as he chose to keep silent about Constantinople. Ironically enough, Belyi, in Switzerland and reading enemy newspapers, could report that the Germans had published an old article by Merezhkovskii, “Holy Sophia” (“Sviataia Sofia”, 1906), as evidence of the belligerent mood of the Russian intelligentsia.³⁵⁰ The German claim

348 Sergei Gorodetskii, “Tsar'grad”, *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 21.10.1914 14446.

349 See pp. 50-1.

350 Andrei Belyi, “Sovremennnye nemtsy”, *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 22.5.1916 15573.

was not far-fetched. Merezhkovskii had twice visited Constantinople – in 1892 and 1904 – and on both occasions he had viewed the city, or more concretely the Hagia Sophia, exclusively through his religious concept of the three Testaments. The Hagia Sophia was for Merezhkovskii the “temple of the first universal unification of nations in the religion of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost”, and its symbolic significance was therefore immense.³⁵¹ Much to his remorse, the Hagia Sophia had been turned into a mosque, the praying crowds representing the lowest stage of the religious development of mankind. The Muslims were still worshiping the Father, that is the God of one nation, while the Christians were by now on the verge of the Religion of the Spirit, that is the third and last Testament. Merezhkovskii was referring to the symbolic essence of Constantinople, but his words could indeed also be interpreted as an encouragement to mount a crusade. Even if Merezhkovskii stayed out of the wartime discussion on Constantinople, his article “Holy Sophia” could serve as a source of inspiration for others.

As it turned out, Sologub and Briusov had also felt an early passion for Tsar’grad. Sologub published a poem, which dated back to 1890 and whose very title, “Oleg’s Shield” (“Olegov shchit”), was in the great tradition.³⁵² Briusov, in “On the Bombardment of the Dardanelles” (“Na bombardirovku Dardanell”, 1915), confessed that while still a young man he had imagined how European soldiers – the modern crusaders – would enter Constantinople and raise St. Andrew’s cross on the Hagia Sophia. The Christian liturgy that had been interrupted four centuries previously would again sound in the cathedral.³⁵³ Two early poems, “A Ray” (“Problek”, 1900) and “July 1903” (“Iiul’ 1903”), confirm Briusov’s words about an old fascination for Constantinople and also show him to be a follower of Tiutchev on this question.³⁵⁴ When Briusov fantasized about seeing a Russian banner waving above Constantinople, his motives were both emotionally anti-Islamic³⁵⁵ and geo-political (“Russia cannot consider itself as having reached its natural borders, as long as the way to its southern sea is in the hands of another state...”).³⁵⁶ At the core of this dream was the notion of Russia as a world power.

351 Merezhkovskii, *Griadushchii kham* (“Sv. Sofia”).

352 Sologub, *Voina*, p. 24 (“Olegov shchit”). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 25.10.1914 14454.

353 Briusov, *Sem’ tsvetov radugi*, p. 136 (“Na bombardirovku Dardanell”). First publ. in *Pesni zhaty: Tetrad’ pervaiia* (Moscow, 1915), p. 11.

354 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 1, pp. 227–8 (“Problek”), 356 (“Iiul’ 1903”).

355 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 1, p. 618 (comm. to “Iiul’ 1903 g.”).

356 Briusov, “Razreshenie makedonskogo voprosa”, p. 231.

The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 gave fresh impetus to Briusov's interest in Constantinople. He anticipated a new era in the history of the world, when the primary conflict would no longer be between nations, but between races, cultures and religions. After a few more European wars, a feeling of unity would emerge, and a common front against the enemies of European culture and Christianity – above all Pan-Mongolism and Pan-Islamism – would develop. One result would be the conquest of Constantinople by Christian armies.³⁵⁷

In March 1915, when the Allied fleet entered the Dardanelles for a second time and bombarded the forts, Briusov wrote three topical poems, "A Fragment" ("Otryvok"), "To the Turks" ("Turkam") and "On the Bombardment of the Dardanelles". The rhetorical device employed in "A Fragment" had already been used in "In the Carpathians". Constantinople is personified as a prisoner, yearning for liberation.³⁵⁸ The device was even less motivated here than in the case of Galicia, as it could hardly be claimed that the population of Constantinople was anticipating the arrival of the English and French troops with joy. Russia had not joined in the offensive, but Briusov hoped that the Russian armies would in due course be able to advance on the Caucasian front. In "To the Turks" he pictures the Russian empire as a giant, standing with one foot on the Finnish granite of Petrograd and with the other on the Pontus Mountains, and throwing menacing glances in the direction of Constantinople. The model was obviously the wartime "lubok", and considering the size and position of the Russian giant, the Turkish city is for him a mere mouthful that he can take or leave as he wishes.³⁵⁹

Briusov's poem "To the Turks" was published in the major newspaper *Birzhevye vedomosti*, and the symbolist's message to the Turks was thus given prominent status. It was no longer Constantinople's role in the history of Christianity that concerned Briusov, but the political and economic importance of the city. The Straits were the door to Russia, and Turkey therefore had no right to possess them. It is true, as Orest Tsekhnovitser puts it, that Briusov actually denied the Turks their right to their own capital,³⁶⁰ but Briusov's main argument was that Turkish possession of Constantinople was unacceptable, as the city's location could also be used – as it had been in the past – against Russia in peacetime.

It was obvious that the religiously indifferent Briusov had no genuine interest in the conflict between Christianity and Islam, but was more aware of

357 Briusov, "Novaia epokha vo vsemirnoi istorii", pp. 103-5.

358 Briusov, *Sem' tsvetov radugi*, p. 135 ("Otryvok"). First publ. in *Pesni zhatvy* (1915), p. 10.

359 *Ibid.*, p. 134 ("Turkam"). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 27.3.1915 14747.

360 Tsekhnovitser, p. 140.

cultural and racial differences. The door simile, based as it was on geo-political considerations, was more congenial to him than the myth of Hagia Sophia. The notion of Russia as the heir to Byzantium, and the symbolic importance of Constantinople were necessary only as arguments for future Russian greatness. What was happening in the Dardanelles in the spring of 1915 was the realization of one of the dreams Briusov had talked about in the poem "The Last War".

Viacheslav Ivanov also sat down to write a poem immediately upon learning about the fighting in the Dardanelles – "The Bowl of the Holy Sophia" ("Chasha Sviatoi Sofii").³⁶¹ Ivanov proposed that it was not the city but the cathedral that had for centuries been waiting for the Orthodox liberators. Much to the delight of the Hagia Sophia – and of Ivanov himself – the crusaders of the twentieth century were now advancing. Ivanov neglected to mention that the attacking troops were not Orthodox, in order not to complicate the revival of the old dream. When Dostoevsky in 1877 had prophesied that Tsar'grad "sooner or later" would become Russian, he had taken it for granted that the city would be liberated by Russians and not by foreigners.

Fedor Sologub truthfully revealed in his "On the Bosphorus" ("U Bosfora") that it was neither Constantinople, nor the Hagia Sophia, but Russia that had been waiting for almost four centuries for the overthrow of Turkish domination.³⁶² Now the time was ripe for a final solution of the Constantinople question. In other connections Sologub had shown that he was not unaware of the economic aspects of the war, but he refused to see the Russian claim to Constantinople as motivated by any material concerns. In the tradition of Tiutchev and Dostoevsky he singled out the symbolic role of the city. By attaining Constantinople, Russia would finally rise to the centre of Christianity.

Sologub's "On the Bosphorus" was written in May 1915. By that time it was already obvious that the offensive against the Turkish city was a failure, one of a series of simultaneous Russian disappointments. A new onslaught was attempted in August, but later during the autumn all troops were withdrawn. Even if Constantinople disappeared from the pages of the Russian press, it was not forgotten by all Tsar'grad romantics. In "Sviatoslav's Bequest" ("Zavet Sviatoslava") of July 1915, Briusov had expressed his gratitude to the soldiers who had fought dauntlessly but in vain for the capture of Constantinople.³⁶³

361 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 36 ("Chasha sviatoi Sofii"). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 22.3.1915 67.

362 Sologub, *Alyi mak*, pp. 205-6 ("U Bosfora").

363 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 348 ("Zavet Sviatoslava"). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 9.8.1915 15015.

Now the Russian seizure of Erzerum and Trabizond six months later made him revive the dream of Tsar'grad ("Razgovor").³⁶⁴

The other die-hard was Ivanov. In June 1915, he repeated his belief in a future liberation of Constantinople. The medium was a poem dedicated to Bal'mont on the occasion of his return to Russia.³⁶⁵ Completely unconcerned by realities, Ivanov also stated in an article six months later that Constantinople had to become Russian for strategic reasons. Without Tsar'grad, Russia was like a human being with only one lung. Forgetting for a moment his religious rhetoric, Ivanov interpreted the whole war as a struggle for Constantinople. Germany and Russia were rivals for the city, and therefore Germany had rejected Russia as an ally and chosen Austria-Hungary instead. Ivanov was clearly unaware of the secret agreement between Russia and the Allied Powers concerning Constantinople, as he stressed the importance of securing England's support for Russia's demands.³⁶⁶ Now that the actual fighting in the Straits had ended, Ivanov was even prepared to accept a Tsar'grad negotiated in a peace treaty rather than conquered by force of arms.

In the Russian discussion of Constantinople, there was open conflict between the symbolic plane and reality, between the religious and the economic aspects of the problem, and between historical tradition and the need for modern Russia to dominate the area. All three symbolists who took an interest in Constantinople were guilty of mixing religious and political arguments. Ivanov carried matters to an extreme by combining the Polish question and Russian interest in Constantinople, a thought not originally his. It was Tiutchev who had predicted in the poem "Only then in full majesty..." ("Togda lish' v polnom torzhestve...", 1850) that a reconciliation between Russia and Poland would occur in Kiev and Tsar'grad.³⁶⁷ The motivation for connecting Poland and Constantinople was Pan-Slavistic, as Constantinople was to become the capital of a united Slavdom, the place where all historical conflicts were to be resolved in advance of new universal missions. In an attack on Ivanov in 1918, Andrei Belyi used the device of "defamiliarization" and read Ivanov's statement as if he had no knowledge of the historical background to the Constantinople question. Belyi's scathingly simple question was why the reconciliation of two nations

364 *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 229-32 ("Razgovor"). First publ. in *Russkie vedomosti* 10.4.1916 83.

365 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 39 ("Otvét Bal'montu").

366 Ivanov, "Rossiia, Angliia i Aziia".

367 Ivanov, "Vselenskoe delo", p. 105; Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, pp. 664-5 ("Pol'skii messianizm, kak zhivaia sila").

had to occur over the body of a third.³⁶⁸ Belyi could also have asked why a religious mission was dependent upon geography and why spirituality had to be promoted by weapons. Some Russian writers and idealistic philosophers actually turned out to be more attracted by the idea of a crusade than by the possibility of exercising Christian love in a peaceful way. Ultimately the thought of earthly Russian power was more inspiring than visions of spiritual superiority. Merezhkovskii deceptively combined these two antagonistic aspects, claiming in August 1917 that the fact that Russia now refrained from all claims on Constantinople and the Straits in spite of their economic importance, revealed how much the Russians loved peace.³⁶⁹ What the Constantinople question had really revealed was the power of myth over the Russian consciousness, and it was only harsh military realities that eventually led to the burial of the dream of Tsar'grad.

Patriotic Fiction

Fedor Sologub: To Believe or to Doubt

Fedor Sologub's "God against the Attacker" marked the beginning of lively literary activity on the subject of the war. Three "war plays" saw the light of day: *The Seeing-Off* (*Provody*, 1914), *The Wreath of Hopes* (*Venets nadezhd*, 1914) and *A Stone Cast into the Water* or *The Vorontsov Family* (*Kamen' broshennyi v vodu* / *Sem'ia Vorontsovykh*, 1915). At the beginning of 1915 thirty-five "war poems", most of which had appeared earlier in newspapers, were published in the volume *War* (*Voina*). The next year – 1916 – the short-story collection *A Fierce Year* (*Iaryi god*) was published: the majority of its seventeen short stories dated from the first year of the war. In 1917 Sologub returned to the theme of the war for the last time, publishing in *The Scarlet Poppy* (*Alyi mak*) many of his "war poems", among them several which had been written since *War*. Sologub was, furthermore, also active as a journalist. In just under a hundred articles and sketches he published in 1914-1917 in Petrograd's leading newspaper *Birzhevye vedomosti*, he primarily discussed questions connected with the war and Russia's role in the events. Here and in the journal *Otechestvo* Sologub formulated the ideology that lay behind his fictional works.

One of the central themes in Sologub's fiction was the need for spiritual mobilization. The question asked in *The Seeing-Off*, a one-act play finished

368 Andrei Belyi, *Sirin uchenogo varvarstva: Po povodu knigi V. Ivanova "Rodnoe i vselenskoe"* (Berlin, 1922), p. 23. First publ. in *Znamia truda* 26.3. and 3.4.1918.

369 D. Merezhkovskii, "Est' Rossiia", *Russkoe slovo* 22.8.1917 191.

as early as September 1914,³⁷⁰ is “who believes in Russia and who doubts?”. The monotony of holiday life in an Estonian coastal village is interrupted by the outbreak of the war. The men are called to arms, but it is not only the characters’ outer life that undergoes change. The intrinsic worth of everyone involved is also revealed. The personae of the play are divided into two distinct camps, and the decisive factor is not so much their attitude to the war as to Russia. Sologub does not create complex characters who would be capable of development; his heroes are instead symbols, representatives of different states of mind. It is the same method that he used in his first novel, *Bad Dreams* (*Tiazhelye sny*), and the short stories of the 1890’s.³⁷¹

Anna and Liza Starkina, mother and daughter, form the two poles in *The Seeing-Off*. Anna Starkina’s scepticism towards her native country is based on memories of the unfortunate Russo-Japanese war, when Russia fell short both in military strength and organizational capability. She feels respect mingled with terror for the Germans, as in the Franco-Prussian War they had shown both shrewdness and cruelty. Experience seems to testify that Russian resistance and sacrifices are meaningless. Because of Anna’s apprehensions about an approaching crushing defeat for Russia, her invariable comment in the play is “It’s terrible... it’s terrible...” Anna’s daughter, Liza, on the other hand, conceives of the war as a feast. German militarism and striving for hegemony in the Slavonic countries had made life before 1914 intolerable. As a result of the war the Russians will at last become masters in their own house, and this goal makes the war just and holy. Liza is supported by the lawyer Ianov, who complains that it had been difficult to breathe freely in pre-war Russia because of the all-embracing German presence.

In order to make the play’s Germanophobia more credible, Sologub chose Estonia as its setting. This feature is emphasized even more in the prose version of the play, “The Truth of the Heart” (“Pravda serdtsa”), with its fierce attacks on the Baltic Germans. The possibility that the demand “to be master in your own house” could also be turned against the Russian presence in Estonia seems to have eluded Sologub. Instead he makes Liza’s betrothed, the idealized Estonian peasant Paul Lippa, side immediately with Russia. That he himself is not a Russian presents no difficulties for him: “At home we can be divided and quarrel. But face to face with the enemy we are all Russians. Dear Russia is for all of us our great fatherland, and we all love it equally.”³⁷²

370 “Novye p’esy F. Sologuba”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 1.9.1914 14346.

371 Liudmila Kleiman, *Ranniaia proza Fedora Sologuba* (Ann Arbor, 1983), pp. 70, 96.

372 Fedor Sologub. *Provody: Dramaticheskii etiud v 1 deistvii* ([Petrograd], [1914]), p. 5.

Sologub was himself in Estonia at the outbreak of the war, and he might have witnessed there a similar solidarity transcending the national borders. But it is more likely that he was trying to anticipate reality, so that, to use his own words, he was writing about “what did not exist, but what had to come”. The example of Lippa is intended to illustrate how the war must unite all of Russia’s citizens. At the same time Sologub must be credited for not forgetting to warn the Russians against adopting a condescending attitude towards the minorities in the Empire. For the class-conscious Anna Starkina the thought that an Estonian peasant might become her son-in-law is as frightening as the German offensive.

For Liza Starkina patriotism is the measure of everything. At the beginning of the play the Russian students Bubenchikov and Kozovalov appear to be serious rivals to Lippa, but when they reveal themselves at the outbreak of war to be faint-hearted egoists who do not want the war to intrude on their private plans, their chances are destroyed. The root meanings of their surnames, i.e. the little bell and the goat, prove to be figurative. In addition, lack of patriotism is always connected to Sologub’s way of thinking with some form of “Westernism”. The students believe in the military superiority of Germany, and in the short-story version Kozovalov, furthermore, reveals his total blindness, when claiming that the Germans are a civilized people, whom Russian civilians have no cause to fear.³⁷³

While Anna Starkina’s doubts are based on knowledge and experience, her daughter’s patriotism is a matter of blind faith. Russia cannot be understood by reason; you just have to believe in it. This is what Tiutchev had stated in his famous “Russia cannot be grasped by reason...” (“Umom Rossii ne poniat’...”, 1866), a poem that for Sologub was of programmatic significance during the war. He who loves Russia believes in it. The belief is transformed into will and the will into victory. This is how Liza’s sweetheart Paul Lippa explains it:

You are a simple, ordinary Russian girl, the kind of girl of which there are very many in Russia. You have the calm and brave heart of a purely Russian girl. You love Russia, and therefore you believe that it must win. And as there are in Russia very many, who like you believe in a victory and want a victory, then you inspire us all with your will to victory, and we will win.³⁷⁴

373 Sologub, *Iaryi god*, p. 13 (“Pravda serdtsa”).

374 Sologub, *Provody*, p. 5.

Paul Lippa emphasizes the representative quality of Liza, but, like Lippa himself, Liza is rather the ideal upon which reality is supposed to model itself. She feels it is her duty to be cheerful and strong and to oppose pessimism and frightening rumours. This, the psychological side of the war, Sologub immediately realized was perhaps of even greater importance than the military might of Germany.

In the final scene of *The Seeing-Off*, the men who have been called up are seen off to the railway station. The characters in the play have split into two camps. Only Anna Starkina and the two Russian students are untouched by the new spirit of unity. Sologub shows how the characters' attitude to Russia also colours their perception of reality: whereas the doubters perceive only tragedy, fear of death and "pure psychopathy", the patriots discover a sense of national pride, and a spirit of self-sacrifice and enthusiasm. In reality the patriots have already gone through the metamorphosis that Sologub believed the war would bring about on all levels. In the eyes of the others Paul Lippa has even changed physically.

As the title *The Seeing-Off* indicated, the play tells how the soldiers are seen off to the war. On a deeper level Sologub asked the question what kind of spiritual heritage they receive from those who remain at home. While Anna Starkina spreads panic and gloom, the positive heroes go to war without fear, inspiring those around them with their optimism. Behind the deeds there had to be an inner conviction and a determination to win. A successful mobilization of this power was the first victory of the war.

In his wartime prose works Sologub wrote strictly about life on the home front. His principal characters all belong to the educated classes. They are professors, teachers, lawyers, officers, writers, artists and students. In percentage terms the educated classes were insignificant in Russia, but Sologub attached great importance to them in the ongoing struggle. The war would be fought not only with weapons, but also with words and thoughts, and therefore the atmosphere at home had a direct influence on the outcome of the military strength. The future was hidden in darkness, but will and belief could influence it. Liza Starkina in *The Seeing-Off* believes in Russia. So do the sisters Raisa and Aleksandra Stargradskaia in *The Edge of the Sword*. "Our cause is just, we are strong, we want to win, and we shall win", says Raisa³⁷⁵ and Aleksandra agrees: "I know that our side will win. How could it fail to win! Our faith

375 Fedor Sologub, "Ostrie mecha", in *Sbornik Lukomor'e: Voennye rasskazy* (Petrograd, [1915]), p. 183.

is so strong, and so is our hope! Russia has given the whole of its soul to its army, how can it fail to win!"³⁷⁶

These women are model patriots, but within the Russian educated classes Sologub also found many people who showed neither love for nor faith in their homeland. These were the Westernizers, the people who had swallowed "the European poison". For them Germany was a "land of holy miracles",³⁷⁷ an expression that Sologub borrowed from the Slavophile Aleksei Khomiakov, and as a result of their unpatriotic attitude modern Russia was covered with "a whole Himalayan range of German culture, science, art".³⁷⁸ In the preface to an anthology of patriotic poems, *Russia in Her Native Songs* (*Rossiiia v rodnykh pesniakh*, 1915), Sologub complained: "Once it was possible to talk about love of the fatherland and about national pride; nowadays the word patriotism is usually put in brackets. Our society prefers to love everything foreign; we love to praise what is foreign and fiercely abuse what is our own."³⁷⁹

This is the prevailing atmosphere when the war is discussed, for example, in the short story "Heart to Heart" ("Serdtsse serdtsu"). On the basis of the protagonists' conversation the narrator generalizes: "*Like all of us* (my emphasis), Nadezhda had been charmed by Europe since childhood, and she was glad that so many of the speakers were defending the Germans."³⁸⁰ Admiration for everything German was so deeply rooted in these educated Russians, and their gullibility was so great that, according to Sologub, not even overwhelming proof of falseness and cruelty by German soldiers had any effect upon them. They refused to believe that Schiller's, Goethe's and Kant's people were waging war "like Huns and Avars".³⁸¹ Sologub reveals his irritation at the fact that not everyone had come under the spell of patriotic literature, or shared his grand vision.

The educated classes had to free themselves from their passion for Germany, the modern form of Westernism, and retrieve a love for and faith in Russia. Only in this way could the Russian army be inspired to victory. What the heart believes in, the soldiers put into effect, Sologub reminded the Belgians in the poem "Consolation to Belgium" ("Uteshenie Bel'gii"),³⁸² and these words

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

³⁷⁷ Sologub, "Vybor orientatsii", p. 105.

³⁷⁸ Sologub, "Mira ne budet".

³⁷⁹ Sologub, "Predislovie", in *Rossiiia v rodnykh pesniakh*, p. [5].

³⁸⁰ Sologub, *Iaryi god*, p. 55 ("Serdtsse serdtsu").

³⁸¹ Sologub, "Mira ne budet".

³⁸² Sologub, *Voina*, p. 20 ("Uteshenie Bel'gii"). First publ. in *Den'* 21.10.1914 286. Also in *Kniga korol'ia Al'berta*, pp. 20-1.

were of course also valid for Russia. Another result of the spiritual treachery of the educated classes was that Russia had not yet been able to define its distinctive national character and accept its historic role.

Spiritual treachery and rebirth is the theme of Sologub's four-act play *The Wreath of Hopes*, which like *The Seeing-Off* was written in the autumn of 1914. *The Wreath of Hopes* was never published, but a detailed summary in *Birzhevyie vedomosti* shows that the play is almost identical with the story *The Edge of the Sword*, dating from the spring of 1915.³⁸³ *The Edge of the Sword* brings us back again to the outbreak of the war. The setting this time is an unnamed Russian provincial town, where the family of officer Stargradskii is living. Together with his son Sergei and his son-in-law El'tsov, the head of the family goes off to the war, while his wife and three daughters flee the enemy and seek refuge in Moscow. There the women, who work as nurses, receive the news that the two young men have fallen. The fame of Lieutenant-General Stargradskii as an outstanding commander, on the other hand, grows and fills those on the home front with pride.

Sologub had material for a realistic novel about the fate of a Russian family during the war, but his approach in *The Edge of the Sword* is allegorical. An inclination towards schematic writing, so striking in *The Seeing-Off*, is even more accentuated here. Sologub fills Stargradskii's circle of acquaintances with a group of highly representative foreigners: the Englishman Richard Weller, the Frenchman Dubois and the German Heinrich Sprudel. The world of the story forms a microcosm, in which the European war is mirrored. The characters are intended to illustrate not only different national characteristics, but also the role of their nations in the war. The members of the Stargradskii family, too, have their own, clearly-defined and emphasized features. *The Edge of the Sword* becomes an allegory, in which the conflicting central forces of the war are stage-managed by the author.

The Stargradskii family represents the educated classes of Russia. The name, which roughly translates as the "Oldtowners", implies tradition and stability. Outwardly they give the impression of being a model patriarchal family, where all are united by mutual love and deep respect. Simplicity, honesty and an unshakable calmness are the distinguishing traits of the head of the family.

383 "Venets nadezhd: Novaia p'esa F.K. Sologuba", *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 10.10.1914 14424. The only essential difference seems to be the end. According to the summary in *Birzhevyie vedomosti* the play ends in a vision of the post-war years, when a rapprochement between the hostile nations is again possible. The story, which may have been written a few months later, leaves no room for such optimism but emphasizes instead annihilation and extermination as the main features of the World War.

But there are cracks in the edifice. The location of both the Stargradskii house and the town indicate vulnerability. The house is situated on the outskirts of the town, and while the front faces a church and a sunny, open square, a garden full of deep shadows is situated on the other side of the house. This garden is the uncontrollable sphere of the instincts. The town is situated on the Western border of Russia, close to an alien outside world. As a consequence of the industrialization process foreign specialists have come to the town and are now courting Russian girls and mixing with Russian families.

The serpent in the Russian paradise is the German engineer, Heinrich Sprudel. He is handsome and well-mannered, loves music, poetry and long walks in the countryside. But this is only a facade, a symbol of how Germany before the war managed to deceive the rest of the world with a cleverly applied mask of civilization. Only in unguarded moments do haughtiness and arrogance shine through Sprudel's intonation and facial expression and reveal his inner thoughts about Russia. "Pride" was the fixed epithet for Germans in Russian patriotic fiction. It was a reflection of the Russian feeling of inferiority when faced with Europe; but as one of the mortal sins for Slavophilism and the opposite of Russian humility, "pride" also indicated arrogance towards one's fellow human beings and ultimately towards God.

The explanation behind Sprudel's walks in the environs of the town is not a weakness for Russian landscapes but espionage carried out on orders from Berlin. His apparent love of literature manifests itself in endless quotations from the works of Schiller. But whereas the Russians quote their Pushkin with consideration and taste, the German engineer's quotations are symptoms of national self-righteousness and absence of individual thoughts and feelings. This feature indicates something mechanical in the German character: "But Sprudel, as if put on rails, rolled on, and his voice acquired a more and more machine-like tone."³⁸⁴ In the mechanized psyche of the German, humaneness has been lost and culture has become an empty reflex.

Human communication with Sprudel is in fact impossible, and it is with some sympathy that Sologub describes the spontaneous wish of El'tsov and Weller to punch him. The war is anticipated here, as violence, it is implied, is the only language that the Germans understand. Even the young Sergei, who until the very last tries to defend Sprudel, finally has enough. "Your Schiller is a dreadful sausage-maker", Sergei says to Sprudel in an attempt to disturb his irritating self-importance and phrasemongering.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ Sologub, "Ostrie mecha", p. 138.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

After drawing the portrait of Sprudel – and through him of the Germans in general – Sologub is prepared to address the problem that worried him most in the early stages of the war, namely the fatal love that the educated classes felt for Germany. In many circles, whose naivety constantly amazes the narrator, Sprudel is a welcome guest. In the town's salons, for example, he meets the headmistress of the local high school for girls, Berta Nachtigal, whose very name reveals her German origins. Nachtigal's conversation consists of slandering everything Russian and praising everything German. "This is, by the way, exactly what many of us like", the narrative voice comments.³⁸⁶ Russian gullibility and weakness for everything European is used by Sprudel in order to gain the information that Berlin needs.

Of Stargradskii's four children, the middle daughter, Liudmila, falls prey to Westernism. Even though love can be blind, Sologub would have had problems within a realistic framework making Liudmila's love for Sprudel credible. But in *The Edge of the Sword* it is precisely the paradoxical and the absurd nature of this infatuation that is stressed. Time and again Sologub draws a parallel between Liudmila and the self-deceiving section of the Russian educated classes, explicitly stressing the allegorical dimension of Liudmila's persona. For Sprudel's sake Liudmila is prepared to set herself against her father, that is against the Russian tradition and her fatherland.

Liudmila has certain traits that have made her more inclined to go astray than the other children. Such features are her composure and prudence. As it is down-to-earth rationality, the fundamental feature of Protestantism according to Sologub,³⁸⁷ and not the genuine Russian traits of intuition and sensitivity that dominate in Liudmila, she is also the one who understands her surroundings least of all, be it the members of her own family, or the Russian people. Liudmila doubts the ability of the Russians to go along with the prohibition of alcohol and, what is worse, she does not believe in a Russian victory. As faith played such a decisive role in Sologub's patriotism, Liudmila is thus on the verge of treason.

Because of her divided sympathies – on the one hand her love for Sprudel, on the other her loyalty towards her family – Liudmila emerges as a unique character not only in *The Edge of the Sword*, but in Sologub's wartime oeuvre in general, as she is in fact standing above the turmoil of battle. Where the others see nations, Liudmila sees human beings. Because of this she cannot hold the whole of the German nation responsible for the war, nor equate German culture with militarism. For her the war is a tragedy for all humankind.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁸⁷ Sologub, "Mira ne budet".

Liudmila expresses her anguish to her father, after her dreams of brotherhood and peace have been crushed:

Are not all peoples perhaps one great family, reigning over the world? Are we not all brothers and sisters? Do we really have to divide ourselves and hate each other like animals of different breeds? (...) Do you really not believe that swords will be beaten into ploughshares? (...) Are perhaps our most cherished expectations only futile dreams? And did our teachers and poets lie to us, when they kept on repeating those lofty words about humankind and the brotherhood of all people?³⁸⁸

Liudmila has great eloquence, but Lieutenant-General Stargradskii calmly crushes his daughter's arguments one by one. Sologub underlines the officer's authority by reducing that of Liudmila. Through interposed comments from the narrator the reader is told that "many of us" had made ourselves guilty of the same "mistakes" as Liudmila. Germany was not divided, says Stargradskii, but the whole of the people – from the workers to the intelligentsia – had unanimously accepted the war policy. German culture had only "polished" the crude national character, but it had not changed the inner essence.³⁸⁹ As the Germans needed new markets for their industries, a war had to break out sooner or later.³⁹⁰ And as Germany could not live side by side with Russia, it was in effect a war of extermination that the Germans had begun.³⁹¹ The World War was not a war between brothers, but a defensive war of peace-loving nations facing the assault of the Teutons.³⁹²

Liudmila's pacifism is in fact only a symptom of her Westernism. Love has affected her discernment and made her blind not only to persons, but also to nations. The only thing that can open the eyes of such a person is the brutal reality of war. In *The Edge of the Sword* Sologub therefore presents a succession of events which all testify to German cruelty. The enemy burns and destroys towns, rapes women, murders civilians and wounded soldiers. Terrifying facts accumulate, but Liudmila steadfastly refuses to believe such testimony. The turning-point is when she receives irrefutable confirmation that even her beloved Sprudel, who had returned to Germany at the outbreak of war, is part of this inhuman war machine. This is analogous to the shock that Russian

³⁸⁸ Sologub, "Ostrie mecha", p. 155.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

intellectuals received, when, for example, they saw Gerhardt Hauptmann's signature on an open letter in defence of Germany's war policy.

Sprudel is indirectly guilty of the death of young Sergei Stargradskii. As the Germans were, according to Sologub, fighting a war of extermination, their armies had been ordered not to take any prisoners. As a matter of course Sprudel orders his subordinates to kill all wounded Russian soldiers. When he recognizes the brother of his fiancée among the slain, he calmly comments, "Not everyone is given the pleasure of killing his fiancée's brother", and adds a quotation from Schiller, "now there is nothing holy anymore".³⁹³ Sologub wanted to show how German culture and militarism lived in symbiosis, how the former had prepared the ground for the latter; and in order to attain this goal he was prepared to sacrifice the reputation of Schiller by using obviously unfair means.

Sologub does not provide us with any glimpses of how the Russian army wages war, but it is taken for granted that it follows ratified conventions and the dictates of the heart. Civilians are not touched, and wounded enemies and prisoners of war are given proper treatment. By contrast, among the enemy the borderline between honesty and dishonesty has been completely erased. "I thought that you were a knight. I was wrong", Liudmila says to Sprudel, when they meet again, after Sprudel has been brought to Russia as a prisoner of war.³⁹⁴ But Sprudel cannot understand this accusation, as words like conscience and honour have lost their meaning for Germans. "The commandment of the Germans is to show no mercy", Sologub wrote in one of his articles. "They do not know and they will never adopt the Russian commandment: do not kick a man when he is down."³⁹⁵

Sologub did not fill *The Edge of the Sword* with stories of German cruelty simply in order to crush the illusions of Liudmila and the Russian educated classes. He had heard from the front that the Russian soldier did not harbour any grudge against the enemy, and that not even news of heinous crimes could provoke in him any hatred or desire for revenge.³⁹⁶ Classical Russian patriotic poetry seemed to confirm that this was a national peculiarity.³⁹⁷ The more dreadful the stories that Sologub reported in *The Edge of the Sword*, the more brightly shone the qualities of the Russians. In the novel Russian kindness

393 *Ibid.*, p. 190.

394 *Ibid.*, p. 207.

395 Sologub, "Mira ne budet".

396 Sologub, "Vybor orientatsii", p. 104.

397 Sologub, "Predislovie", in *Voina v russkoi poezii*, pp. 5-6; "Predislovie", in *Rossiia v rodnykh pesniakh*, p. [6].

is extended to include even Sprudel. The eldest daughter Aleksandra, whose husband and brother have become victims of German barbarity, is unable to hate Sprudel, and the explanation given is national: "I have the soul of a simple Russian woman, and I feel within me the strength to forgive."³⁹⁸

"Are they really all like this?" Raisa Stargradskaia asks after having watched how impudently the German minority in Russia behave during the war.³⁹⁹ As Sologub's literary method is to generalize, his answer is in the affirmative. All Germans are alike, as they have been formed by the same religion and the same culture. In *The Seeing-Off* Sologub showed how the local Germans in Estonia take advantage of the boundless Russian tolerance, and in *The Edge of the Sword* we meet the technologist Müllendorff, who for many years has been working at a factory in Russia, but who now openly rejoices at the prospect of "our people", that is the Germans, soon capturing Moscow.⁴⁰⁰ German prisoners of war also capitalize on Russian goodness and demand champagne and first-class compartments on trains. An amazed Russian lieutenant comments: "You know, the Russians are too soft-hearted. They prefer to forgive."⁴⁰¹ Sologub himself shows a divided attitude: he is shocked and provoked by the brutality of the enemy, but acknowledges the kindness of the Russian people.

Liudmila breaks off her engagement with Sprudel, when his true nature is exposed. But if the educated classes' faith in Germany died in the war, on what ground could the future be built? Sologub gives his answer in the figure of the youngest of the Stargradskii sisters, Raisa. While Liudmila trusts in her reason, Raisa is a religious mystic. Liudmila has been "blind", whereas Raisa is clairvoyant. A week before the beginning of the war she has a dream about a war and later she confirms her prophetic gift through further dreams and visions. It is Raisa who unmasks Sprudel with the help of a dream. The German officer did not expect anyone ever to find out what had happened on a faraway battlefield, but now the European rationalist has to surrender to the Russian mystic.

Unlike Liudmila, who is of the opinion that Russia has to learn from Europe, Raisa seeks the company of Russian pilgrims and holy men. In the eyes of the others this is a mistake as fatal as allowing oneself to be taken in by the glib phrases of a German engineer. But Liudmila thinks differently:

³⁹⁸ Sologub, "Ostrie mecha", p. 202.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

What does ignorance mean? Does holiness really need book-learning and the teaching of professors? Does not God reveal himself to simple people and children? The pride of the human intellect! Always thinking about the poor science of man in this world, where everything simply shines and rejoices, and the heaven expands its blue cover above the wide expanses of the valleys!⁴⁰²

Contemporary readers might have been inclined to read this passage as an indirect defence of Grigorii Rasputin's prominent position at the Russian court; but Sologub was clearly thinking in broader terms. Sologub's heroine posits intuitive wisdom against scholarly tradition and scientific discoveries, presenting it as one of the decisive differences between West and East. It is the same insight that the nobleman Pierre Bezukhov in Lev Tolstoi's *War and Peace* (*Voina i mir*) attained on meeting the peasant soldier Platon Karataev. However, Sologub's two representatives of the people, the pilgrim Nikandr and Father Grigorii, remain abstract characters who are not even allowed to appear in the story. Instead it is the highly-strung young Raisa, who represents the authentic Russian element. In Sologub's wartime short stories ("Serdtsse serdtsu", "Tanin Richard", "Nadezhda voskreseniia") we find several female characters reminiscent of Raisa, that is women whose visionary power has been sharpened during the war.

Even before the outbreak of the war, Sologub had contrasted earth-bound souls and those in contact with a higher reality in his writing. Those early dreams and visions were presented as doorways to fantasy worlds, escapes from the oppression of everyday life. In *The Edge of the Sword* and the wartime short stories these scenes provide accurate glimpses into the future, or into simultaneous but faraway events. We are dealing here with "holy wonders",⁴⁰³ in which the medium is always a pious woman and the message is usually received in front of an icon. The clairvoyant heroine is always confronted by sceptics, while the reader, on the other hand, soon realizes that the unsophisticated and realistically constructed dreams will without fail come true down to the last detail. In literary terms the device functions poorly, as the supernatural element unfailingly exposes the denouement of the stories. But what Sologub wanted to convey was that there was in Russia a spiritual reserve that a rational Europe knew nothing about. An anonymous reviewer in *Birzhevyi vedomosti* drew a parallel between Sologub's Raisa and Sirena in Gabriele D'Annunzio's

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴⁰³ Sologub, *Iaryi god*, p. 61 ("Serdtsse serdtsu").

play *La Gioconda* (1899);⁴⁰⁴ but for Sologub the clairvoyant disposition was as much a distinguishing feature of the “mystic East” as a symbolist archetype.

Sprudel had found something of the German female ideal in Liudmila and dreamed of bringing her to his fatherland, where she could be finally Germanized. The events of the novel stop short of bridal rape, but as a prisoner of war in Moscow Sprudel makes a last attempt to fulfill his wicked plans. However, here in the heart of Russia he is powerless. Rejected and insulted, he tries to shoot his fiancée, but the weapon is knocked out of his hand by Raisa and Weller, the representatives of Holy Russia and its ally England. In spite of Sprudel's wiliness they do not take revenge on him, with Raisa remarking: “This man has done all the evil that he can. Now he is like a snake without poison.”⁴⁰⁵ In the utopian future which is taking shape in Moscow, there is no room for Germans. Excluded from the community, he leaves, as bewildered by the magnanimity of the enemy as by the shock he received when his clever plans were frustrated.

In the shadow of Liudmila's and Sprudel's dramatic settling of accounts another important battle of principles is also fought in *The Edge of the Sword*. The story starts on “a serene and quiet morning”, but this idyllic atmosphere turns out to be false. While Lieutenant-General Stargradskii stands out as a model of goodness and fidelity, his wife Ekaterina vacillates in her loyalty to her husband. In her youth she had been in love with her neighbour Pavel Buravov, and after having recently lost his wife Buravov has started to court her with renewed ardour.

In 1912 Sologub had planned to write a play, in which the conflict derived from the “drama of a good, noble, pure woman, to whom real love comes when she already has a husband and children. She resists the feeling as she has no strength either to leave the children, or to crush the life of her husband, and this forms the conflict of the play.”⁴⁰⁶ A fact overlooked by critics is that Sologub fulfilled this plan two years later in *The Wreath of Hopes* and *The Edge of the Sword*, with the war now as a decisive element in the drama.

Ekaterina reciprocates Buravov's feelings, but her marriage vows and the thought of her children make her hesitate. The news about her husband's exploits in the war awakens her conscience and she rejects the advances of her former lover. To leave her husband at a moment when he is defending the fa-

404 “Venets nadezhd: Novaia p'esa F.K. Sologuba”.

405 Sologub, “Ostrie mecha”, p. 215.

406 A.A. Izmailov, “U F.K. Sologuba: Interv'iu”, in Fedor Sologub, *Tvorimaia legenda*, vol. II (Moscow, 1991), p. 233. First publ. in *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 19-20.9.1912 13151, 13153.

therland is “a criminal dream”,⁴⁰⁷ and in the ancient drama between passion and duty, duty proves to be the stronger, and the family bonds hold fast.

But it is not only a matter of Stargradskii retaining his wife under the morally strengthening influence of war. The remorseful married woman who turns her beau away during the war, or breaks with her lover actually becomes something of a stock type in Sologub's writing and made a critic wonder if the writer was of the opinion that the family in general and female morality in particular needed a thirty-year war every century.⁴⁰⁸ It is always the woman who is the weak link in the family. Another pattern is that the lover or admirer displays his wretched character in his attitude to the war and Russia. He openly rejoices at not being called to arms (“Vizit”) or expresses his sympathy for Germany and his contempt for “the dirty Russian peasant” (“Vozvrashchenie”)⁴⁰⁹. Even when he does not explicitly nurse sympathies for the Germans, he is in any case Germanic in character. He thinks mechanically and is a prisoner of his own thoughts (“Svet vechernii”).⁴¹⁰ Buravov in *The Edge of the Sword* has studied in Germany for many years and has many friends among German writers and scientists. Contact with Germany has evidently left a deep mark on his character, as he is a fully-fledged rationalist who scorns the Russian mysticism represented by Raisa Stargradskaia.

During the war it was of utmost importance to keep the family intact. It was a guarantee of the power of resistance and of the survival of Russia. At the same time the matrimonial and family question was not isolated from Sologub's neo-Slavophilism. The family had been given the same central place by the Slavophiles of the nineteenth century: the family forms the basis of society and in its inner relations the Slavonic aptitude for mutual respect and loyalty was shown. The temptation of immorality and the threat to the institution of the family always come from the outside, from the West.⁴¹¹

When the Stargradskii family flees from the war and goes to Moscow, it also moves towards the East, that is towards knowledge and wisdom. The Stargradskiis have been living in a border town, close to the pernicious and corrupt West, but in Moscow they can adopt a new, more valid approach to life. The victories that are won in *The Edge of the Sword* are of a spiritual kind. The sword-blows that the characters in the play feel in their hearts indicate that illusions are breaking down and the truth is emerging. Lieutenant-General

407 Sologub, “Ostrie mecha”, p. 173.

408 Al. Ozhigov, “O belletristicheskoi mobilizatsii”, *Sovremennyi mir* 9 (1915), part II, p. 161.

409 Sologub, *Iaryi god*, p. 151 (“Vozvrashchenie”).

410 *Ibid.*, p. 137 (“Svet vechernii”). First publ. in *Shchit*, pp. 162-8.

411 Riasanovsky, p. 132.

Stargradskii is right when he sees the war as necessary for Russia, as it will “untie many knots”.⁴¹² One of the “knots” was the love of the intelligentsia for Germany and their distrust of their own people, another the German-inspired assault on the family.

The Edge of the Sword also included a supranational utopia. When Raisa Stargradskaia becomes engaged to the Englishman Weller, on a realistic level it is their attitude to the war that unites them. Heroism and patriotism bring the lovers together, comments one critic.⁴¹³ At the same time their engagement is also a symbol of the historic alliance between Russia and England that Sologub advocated. The couple is seen by the others as ill-matched, as the Englishman has in all respects given the impression of being a cold rationalist. Weller's attitude to Raisa's dreams and her confidant, the illiterate peasant Nikandr, is in fact as sceptical as Sprudel's. But Raisa has based her choice of partner upon a dream, and Weller in his turn recognizes in Raisa the piety and temperament of English women. Weller agrees to wear Raisa's cross around his neck during the war, and he is seen not only playing tennis with his fiancée, an English sport introduced to Russia, but also kneeling by Raisa's side before an icon. Russia has managed to guide sceptical England into the domain of religion and bring it closer to the “mystical East”.

Konstantin Bal'mont: Cursing the Satanic Dogs

At the outbreak of the war Konstantin Bal'mont decided to remain in Soula-sur-Mer, in order to see how the German invasion of France would end. At this point he shared the widespread belief that the war would be a violent but short *blitzkrieg*, lasting for not more than 2-3 months. In November, when the immediate threat was over, he moved to Paris. Here he engaged himself with the cause of the Allied Powers by frequently appearing at charitable occasions reading his poetry. The Russians enjoyed great sympathy in France during the war, but Bal'mont was nevertheless experiencing a growing feeling of alienation. He longed for his native country, whose fate he followed through Russian newspapers.⁴¹⁴

On 10/23 May 1915 Bal'mont left Paris and travelled via London, Newcastle, Kristiania (Oslo) and Torneå to Russia. Immediately upon his arrival Bal'mont expressed his opinion about the war in interviews, later expanding his state-

⁴¹² Sologub, “Ostrie mecha”, p. 161.

⁴¹³ Leitner, p. 146.

⁴¹⁴ “Priezd K.D. Bal'monta”, *Utro Rossii* 2.6.1915 150; “Priezd K.D. Bal'monta”, *Russkie vedomosti* 2.6.1915 125; “U K.D. Bal'monta”.

ments into two articles, "The Artist-People" ("Narod-khudozhnik", 1915) and "A Word About Poland" ("Slovo o Pol'she", 1916). He saw the war as an unavoidable historical clash, since the Germans had posed a threat to neighbouring countries not only for the last decade, but for centuries past, and a final settlement of the latent conflict had thus been inevitable and even desirable.⁴¹⁵ A decisive factor behind the war had been Germany's policy of perpetual rearmament, but the roots of the conflict lay in the German national spirit, which Bal'mont defined as a combination of a haughty feeling of superiority and an inclination for violence.⁴¹⁶

Bal'mont's attack upon the German nation could have appeared as surprising, as German culture had been of vital importance to him in his formative years.⁴¹⁷ In his teens he had studied the German language and read German Romantic poetry, and later he distinguished himself as a brilliant translator of Goethe, Hoffmann, Lenau, Heine and Gerhardt Hauptmann. Now Bal'mont stressed that all this had only been a shortlived infatuation, soon turning into hatred. History and personal experience, as well as literature, had opened his eyes to the true, appalling nature of the Germans. His literary preferences had shifted from German authors to Slavonic and Anglo-Saxon literature. Even Friedrich Nietzsche, whose *Also sprach Zarathustra* had once made a deep impression upon him, he now regarded partly as an ideologist of the "repulsive supercilious attitude" that the enemy demonstrated at war.⁴¹⁸

It might seem that Bal'mont was condemning traits in the Germans that were otherwise dear to him. He was known for his egotism and love of the free individual, and in the Poles he had honoured, as shown above, precisely their individualism and pugnacity. But what was held to be authentic in himself and the Poles was seen as just a mask in the enemy, concealing in fact the very opposite. The German feeling of superiority was unfounded. The cultural and material riches of Germany were the results of theft and a ruthless exploitation of other nations,⁴¹⁹ and the genuine German instinct was not to respect individuality but to blur all differences. The Germans strove for total domination and therefore coexistence was impossible:

The greediness of the Germans knows no bounds, and the systematic character of their spirit does not confine itself to the outer conquest of

⁴¹⁵ Bal'mont, "Slovo o Pol'she".

⁴¹⁶ "Priezd K.D. Bal'monta", *Utro Rosii* 2.6.1915.

⁴¹⁷ See, for example, "Iubilei K. Bal'monta", *Utro Rossii* 23.12.1911 295.

⁴¹⁸ "U K.D. Bal'monta".

⁴¹⁹ Bal'mont, "Narod-khudozhnik".

neighbouring nationalities, but will always strive to depersonalize them, humiliate, kill everything in them that is their own. Drive them away from their own soil. Forbid them to think and feel in the way that it is impossible for them not to think and feel.⁴²⁰

Among the symbolists Bal'mont's Germanophobia surpassed only that of Sologub and was apt to draw attention as much to the writer as to the object of his assault. The Germans were for him not only odious, unscrupulous and shameless,⁴²¹ but also "satanic dogs" ("Gerb zataennogo Mesiatsa").⁴²² Instead of killing without hatred, as Bal'mont had predicted in the poem "War Is Not Hostility" ("Voina ne vrazhda") of 1905,⁴²³ he was actually hating without killing. Just as in 1905-1906 Bal'mont appeared to have lost all sense of proportion, abusing the enemy with the strongest possible invective.

The Belgian and Polish events certainly played their part in stimulating Bal'mont's indignation, but their importance was not decisive. The expression "satanic dogs" was in fact not chosen completely at random, as Bal'mont viewed the events as a clash between good and evil, between God and the devil in a general, non-Christian sense. This might have seemed ironic, as a decade earlier Bal'mont had repeatedly displayed an amoral attitude, close to that of the Nietzschean superman ideal. But what he was doing now was to project upon the war a basic conflict of importance to him, that is not a moral clash, but a conflict between spirituality and materialism, unique beauty and gray uniformity, the individual and the faceless crowd, the creative artist and the parasite. Within the symbolist movement Bal'mont had shaped a distinctive image of himself as an extoller of the freedom-loving, ecstatic individual, open to the beauty of the world and the variety of many cultures, all values that now seemed to be in danger. In this sense the war could be seen as a prolongation of the struggle to establish symbolism not only within the arts, but also as a philosophy of life.

Distinctive national features had not always been easily discernible before 1914, but the effect of the war was, according to Bal'mont, to reveal the inner essence of everyone involved. Therefore, the same events had a completely different effect upon different nationalities. While they revealed the "satanic swinish mask" of the Germans, they made the French go through a wonderful

420 Bal'mont, "Slovo o Pol'she".

421 Bal'mont, "Narod-khudozhnik".

422 Bal'mont, "Gerb zataennogo Mesiatsa".

423 Bal'mont, *Liturgiia krasoty*, pp. 121-3 ("Voina ne vrazhda").

spiritual metamorphosis. Awareness of the mortal threat to their national existence brought forth complete unity and an unquestioned readiness to sustain the burdens of the war and defend their native land. Even Paris, the “capital of joy”, immediately underwent a change, assuming “a calm and stern visage”. During the first year of war in France, Bal’mont did not witness a single coarse scene, but met only tactfulness and a forbearing silence. In the attitude of the French he saw something of classical beauty, “a beauty from times, when there were no divisions between soldiers and civilians, when every man knew what war and the enemy meant”.⁴²⁴

The poem “Mother” (“Mat”) was an attempt by Bal’mont to depict the “beauty” of the war. It has traits of a timeless dramatic monologue, but the mention of a rosary places it in a Catholic and French context. A mother bids her fallen son farewell, and even if he has been everything to her, raised with tender love, she is able to bless his death and see it as the crowning of her endeavours. The boy was still young at the outbreak of the war, but he reacted to the events like “the string answers other strings”, falling in the first line of the first battle.⁴²⁵ The influence of Classical Greek patriotic poetry is clearly discernible.

The task of the French people was not only to demonstrate an exemplary patriotism and repulse the enemy, but also, as the artistic people *per se*, to preserve and develop the “great commandment of beauty”.⁴²⁶ The word “beauty”, one of the utopian goals of humankind, denotes here not only a developed aesthetic sense, but also a certain attitude to life. The Slavonic peoples were also fulfilling a great mission in the war. Just as the Russians had once prevented the Mongol hordes from reaching Europe, Poland and Russia were now together saving Europe from the Germans. But the moment of truth for the Slavs would dawn only after the war. One important result of the events of the war would be a rebirth of the Slavonic peoples – as well as the Russians and the Poles, Bal’mont mentioned the Serbs, the Czechs and, inconsistently, also the Lithuanians. After the war these people would witness an unprecedented prosperity and the “rusty, bloody smell of weapons” that had lingered over Europe would be replaced by the “fresh scent of Slavonic (...) fields and all the flowers that free people know how to cultivate”.⁴²⁷ As flowers were Bal’mont’s

424 Bal’mont, “Narod-khudozhnik”.

425 K. Bal’mont, “Mat”, *Russkoe slovo* 3.11.1914 259.

426 *Ibid.*

427 Bal’mont, “Slovo o Pol’she”.

recurrent symbol for the arts,⁴²⁸ the Slavonic peoples were thus, together with the French, chosen to replace German militarism with artistic creation.

"Hail to the Slavonic peoples", Bal'mont exclaimed in the poem "Beat the Drum" ("Bei v baraban"). But it does seem as if he perceived Russia as the weak link in the Slavonic family. It might even have seemed as if Bal'mont's involvement in the war was based more upon hatred for the German and reverence for the Polish spirit than on pure Russian patriotism. Almost every word of praise for Russia was followed by misgivings. When applauding the Russian policy of prohibition introduced in 1914, Bal'mont at the same time admitted that the greatest joy for a Russian was to drink. Russian power was for him embodied in Il'ia Muromets, the main hero of the medieval Russian *bylina* genre. Il'ia Muromets always defeated his enemies in the end, but, as Bal'mont reminded his readers, he himself was often defeated. Il'ia loved "the broad daylight and the bright sun" and deserved love, but at times he could also be "a little coarse".⁴²⁹ It has been said that only in emigration did Bal'mont realize how dear Russia was to him.⁴³⁰ As for the period 1914-17, Bal'mont above all hoped that Russia would learn the true meaning of freedom and individuality through the war and with the help of its allies and would finally occupy a worthy place in the Slavonic and European community.

The war and his forced separation from Russia did not affect Bal'mont's remarkable productivity. During the winter in France he translated three Indian plays, worked on a collection of fairy-tales and legends from Oceania and wrote the sonnets, *terzinas* and epic poems that were to form the basis of his next collection of poetry, *The Ash Tree: The Vision of a Tree*. Even if Bal'mont had felt himself to have been "mobilized" by the events,⁴³¹ for a long time the war left remarkably few explicit traces in his writings.⁴³² Once he was back in Russia, Bal'mont dismissed the few poems that had been published in the Russian press from November 1914 onwards as being of minor importance. Significantly, he did not include them in any of his future books.

Theoretically, Bal'mont, like Briusov, drew a clear line between pure poetry and poems connected with the present moment. His "war poems" were

428 See Hildegard Schneider, *Der frühe Bal'mont: Untersuchungen zu seiner Metaphorik* (Munich, 1970), pp. 94 ff.

429 Bal'mont, "Slovo o Pol'she".

430 Silvia Althaus-Schönbucher, *Konstantin D. Bal'mont: Parallelen zu Afanasij A. Fet. Symbolismus und Impressionismus* (Bern, 1975), p. 39 n. 10.

431 K.D. Bal'mont, "[Voina i tvorcestvo: Otvet na anketu]", *Utro Rossii* 10.12.1916 344.

432 Nevertheless, a reservation must be made in this connection. As there does not exist any bibliography of Bal'mont's writing from this period, the task of finding all his "war poems" is next to impossible.

disqualified from inclusion in the main body of his work, as the rational element in them dominated over any spontaneous, impressionistic features: "They are rather religious-philosophical thoughts about the war with sketches of its monstrous face."⁴³³ The poet's involvement in history and politics was therefore, even if natural and unavoidable, a step away from his true realm. Something that Bal'mont did not comment upon or even show awareness of was the challenge to traditional poetic language that the modern war constituted. Like Sologub he did not fight shy of using clichés of patriotic poetry like "the enemy hordes" (*vrazhdebnye polchishcha*), "the righteous sword" (*pravyi mech*) and "the mighty bell" (*kolokol moguchii*), thereby depriving his "war poems" of expressiveness and originality.

The first of Bal'mont's "war poems" to be published in the Russian press was "The Peal of Battle" ("Blagovest boia"):

As in a dark desert where midnight
is spreading its tent, I hear,
over the abyss, the loud peal of church bells
starting a conversation with God.

The maelstrom-like striving
of hostile hordes has sped by
and greater than cannon-thunder is the singing,
and brighter than blood is the dew of tears.

Let the Devil of the fray beat his tambourine,
turning the battle and the fire crimson –
the call of God is many-trumpeted
and the righteous sword strikes a blow.

Above the agitated storm-cloud,
above a pile of a million corpses,
I can hear a mighty bell;
in days of adversity it has always sounded.

Boil on, frightful element:
may the whole poison boil away in war!

433 "U K.D. Bal'monta".

When Russia raises its voice
the thunder of Heaven speak.*⁴³⁴

The poem is symptomatic of Bal'mont's wish to look behind the "monstrous face" of the war and to grasp its inner meaning. Except for the interposed, disturbing assertion that God speaks through Russia's military power, Bal'mont is here, just as in "Beat the Drum" and "Separated" ("Razluchennye"), maintaining a highly abstract level of discourse, thus marking an important difference between "war poetry" and political journalism. In Bal'mont's "war poems" the war is presented on a mythological level as a battle between God and the devil. The consciousness of all people has been fettered by the "fierce serpent" ("Razluchennye"), but through the war's purifying process the Devil-Snake's venom is purged to a harmless state ("Blagovest boia") and a coming "great Spring" is predicted ("Razluchennye")⁴³⁵.

According to Bal'mont, Germany was striving for total subjugation and dominance, threatening to germanize Europe into a single, colourless unity. To withstand the German avalanche was thus to assert the freedom of the individual, racial independence and beauty. Victory was worth any sacrifices, as mankind had to go through "the blazing flames of purgatory" to make progress and win the ultimate freedom. Progress did not mean material gains, but a qualitative and profound renewal of life itself. Bal'mont was thus also grafting apocalyptic expectations onto the war. The ultimate goal, visualized as a "Holy Spring", was that the Spirit would infuse "discordant matter" with life and subordinate it to "the wise Chief Architect". History would be transformed into justice, harmony would triumph, and human life would turn into Beauty.⁴³⁶ This was the utopia of a pantheist, envisaging the goal of history as a final unification between God and creation.

* "Ia slyshu, kak v pustyne temnoi,/ Gde polnoch' shirit svoi shater,/ Nad bezdnoi blagovest ob'emnyi/ Zavodit s Bogom razgovor.// Vodovorotnoe stremlen'e/ Vrazhdebnykh polchishch proneslos', -/ I vyshe groma pushek - pen'e,/ I iarche krovi - rosy slez.// Pust' D'iavol brani b'et v svoi buben,/ Bagrov'ia bitvu i pozhar, -/ Prizyv ot Boga mnogotruben,/ I pravyy mech neset udar.// Nad vzbudorazhennoi tuhei,/ Nad millionnoi grudoj tel,/ Ia slyshu kolokol moguchii, -/ On v dni nevzgod vsegda gudel.// Kipi zhe, strashnaia stikhiia,/ V voine da vykipit ves' iad, -/ Kogda zagovorit Rossiia,/ To gromy Neba govoriat."

434 K. Bal'mont, "Blagovest boia", *Russkoe slovo* 9.11.1914 259.

435 K. Bal'mont, "Razluchennye", *Utro Rossii* 30.11.1914 297.

436 Bal'mont, "Slovo o Pol'she". See also Bal'mont, "Narod-khudozhnik".

The Critics of Nationalism

Zinaida Gippius: Accepting the War Outwardly, Rejecting It Inwardly

In 1919, five years after the outbreak of the First World War, Zinaida Gippius wrote in her diary: "Oh, how I always hated it, this European disgrace, this absurd snare that humankind imposed on itself! (...) From the very first moment I knew that this war threatens the *whole* of Europe, both the winners and the losers, with innumerable misfortunes."⁴³⁷ In *The Blue Book* (*Siniaia kniga*), the diary that Gippius kept sporadically during the war, it is not difficult to find passages that testify to genuine shock and disgust. The war was the "Gigantic Madness", that kept her in a state of constant gloom.⁴³⁸

It would seem quite logical to call Gippius a "convinced 'pacifist'" on the basis of her hatred of the war. The case would be even more clearcut if, as has been claimed, Gippius had repeatedly expressed the thought, both in her articles and her poems, that killing is also murder when it is organized and sanctioned by governments in the form of war.⁴³⁹ However, a statement as radical as this could not have been voiced openly in Russia during the war. The opinions that Gippius actually expressed during the war were thus much more complicated and even contradictory, as the writer tried to overcome the limits set up by censorship and public opinion.⁴⁴⁰

Gippius' first public comment on the war, "That Is How It Should Be, That Is How It Will Be" ("Tak nado – tak budet"), an article published on 8 August 1914, contains no traces of pacifism, despite the strong anti-war sentiments that were simultaneously recorded in her diary. Gippius appears to be, on the contrary, just one of the many Russian writers turned into ardent patriots by the war. When looking for the causes of the war, her attention is turned solely to Germany. The false development of Germany had caused the war, and Russia's mission was to free Europe, both physically and spiritually, through a military victory. Not even national self-satisfaction was missing, as Gippius claimed that Russia's duty was made easier by the fact that its people possessed the traits of character necessary for such a lofty mission.

At the core of the war there lay a conflict between what Gippius labelled as two cultures, an inner and an outer, or a spiritual and a mechanical. The state

⁴³⁷ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 182.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁴³⁹ Pachmuss, *Zinaida Hippius*, p. 182.

⁴⁴⁰ M.B. Koz'menko, "Zinaida Gippius: '... Voina uzhe ne mozhnet rastit' dushu...'", in *Politika i poetika: Russkaia literatura v istoriko-kulturnom kontekste Pervoi mirovoi voiny. Publikatsiia, issledovaniia i material* (Moscow, 2014), p. 632.

of a nation depended upon the relationship between these two cultures and their mutual stimulation. In Germany the mechanical culture had developed faster than the spiritual, and the spirit had been enslaved by matter. The result was that the forces behind the mechanical culture became destructive and Germany had turned into a Machine, not controlled by human reason and will, but left to its own devices. In this well-oiled machine, the emperor was just the cog-wheel at the top, devoid of any independent role.⁴⁴¹ The German state was thus the very embodiment of mechanization and automation, the last stage of the dehumanization process that the symbolists had warned of long before 1914. Germany was also the enemy of Christian sociality, as Protestantism was a religion for the isolated individual, leading to Man-God,⁴⁴² and its national culture was dominated by repulsive positivism and bourgeois mediocrity.

The inevitable results of a distorted national development were militarism and barbarity. Like most Russian intellectuals, Gippius was genuinely shocked by the reports of German atrocities. After learning the news of the German occupation of Belgium, the ravaging of Leuven, the bombardment of Reims Cathedral and the threat against Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, she wrote on 29 September (12 October) in her diary: "The 'debasement' of the Germans, in the form of their devastating fury, cannot be doubted."⁴⁴³ The Germans had in fact put the program of Italian futurism into practice, as they praised war, devastated cultural monuments and raped women.⁴⁴⁴ Science was no longer used in the battle against nature, but in order to exterminate people. "Germany is monstrous, unhappy and unbearable, as it is today still existing at a level which for cultured humankind is already part of history", Gippius concluded.⁴⁴⁵

All the same the real enemy was not the German nation as such, but the naked, dominating, mechanical culture, that was stifling its "soul". This was not culture any longer, but barbarity, and to wish for a victory over barbarity was natural. Russia's task in the war was to liberate the enslaved soul of Germany. This goal had nothing to do with military aggression or imperialism, but was an operation necessary for Germany itself. The true Germany strove for liberation and was thus an ally of Russia in the war. On the highest level the war was a struggle for the liberation of Europe from automation.⁴⁴⁶

441 Z. Gippius, "Tak nado – tak budet", *Den'* 8.8.1914 212.

442 Pachmuss, *Zinaida Hippius*, p. 180.

443 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 237.

444 Z.N. Gippius, "Voina, literatura, teatr", in *Chego zhdet Rossiia ot voiny: Sbornik statei* ([Petrograd], [1915]), p. 100.

445 Gippius, "Tak nado – tak budet".

446 Zinaida Gippius [pseud. Anton Krainii], "Iskazheniia", *Golos zhizni* 6 (1914), pp. 4-5.

Russia was the very opposite of Germany, as its spiritual culture was more developed than its mechanical culture. This was admittedly unbalanced, but Gippius preferred it to the German situation, because according to her it was closer to the Christian ideal. Gippius heard from a priest about the “holy spirit” of Russian soldiers as they departed for the front. Everybody was filled with a “joyous readiness, courage, seriousness, simplicity and no *malice* whatsoever”.⁴⁴⁷ The Russians had not wished for war, but they still accepted it instinctively and simply. It was this humble simplicity and lack of hatred that were, as Tolstoi had shown in *War and Peace*, the surest guarantee of victory.

The war, as Gippius interpreted it in “That Is How It Should Be, That Is How It Will Be”, had a meaning and a goal. The victory of the Allied Powers was essential for the whole of humankind. Without explicitly using the conceptual pair West and East, Gippius eventually came to use the same division as the neo-Slavophiles: while Germany represented the false way, Russia embodied the true, or rather the truest possible course. However, Gippius did not become a neo-Slavophile. The scheme that she offered in the autumn of 1914 was neither repeated nor developed. This does not necessarily mean that Gippius rejected her spontaneous interpretation of the war as false. Rather it can be said that a national self-righteousness started to appear to her as a temptation that had to be overcome through conscious effort. On the basis of her own first reactions, Gippius became afraid of turning into a “splinter in the stream of events”, led not by reason but by emotion.⁴⁴⁸ She never doubted the necessity of a victory of the Allied Powers, but she saw the role of the war in the spiritual development of humankind and the clash between the war and the ethical sense of the individual as issues of greater importance.

In her diary for 2 August 1914 Gippius raised a question of fundamental importance for herself: “How is it that war in general, every war, is an evil, and only this war is a blessing?”⁴⁴⁹ Her own answer was that there were no reasons for making an exception. The present conflict was a war like any other war, in spite of her own public claims to the contrary, and therefore this time, too, the answer to the war had to be a firm “No!”.⁴⁵⁰ When compelled to declare her position at a private occasion a few months later, she repeated her principled rejection of war, but then unexpectedly added that she wished for a victory of the Allied Powers, “as the war is already a fact”.⁴⁵¹

447 Zinaida Gippius [pseud. Anton Krainii], “V nashi vremena”, *Golos zhizni* 4 (1914), p. 11.

448 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 234.

449 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

450 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

451 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

There was an obvious contradiction here, as Gippius condemned the war in principle, but in reality accepted it. However, the paradox was deliberate. Gippius' point was that the conflict between "yes" and "no" could not and should not be settled. That the war should remain a tragedy and an unsettled matter of conscience was one of the main theses of "History in Christianity" ("Istoriia v khristianstve"), a talk that Gippius gave in November 1914 at the Petrograd Religious-Philosophical Society. Published as "The Great Path" ("Velikii Put"), the lecture stands out as her main public statement on the war.

In her talk Gippius treated the war not as an isolated historical phenomenon, but viewed it within the framework of her apocalyptic religion. The "Great Path" was the road that Christianity travelled along on its way towards the goal of history. On this path humankind passed through three stages: collectivism, individualism and all-humanity (*vsechelovechestvo*). Gippius did not define more closely what she meant by all-humanity in this connection, but the synonyms that she used – a "creative collective", a "new insoluble Unity", universalism, "ecumenicism" (*vselenskost'*) – indicate that the concept was broader and more apocalyptically coloured than when used by Dostoevskii in his Pushkin speech. Whereas Dostoevskii referred to a supranational consciousness, Gippius had in mind rather a universal humanity and a realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.⁴⁵² Her utopian concept of all-humanity was close to Solov'ev's and Merezhkovskii's Godmanhood (*Bogochelovechestvo*), while *vselenskost'* can be interpreted as a synonym for Ivanov's *sobornost'*, that is a brotherhood in God.

If history was the movement of humanity towards the attainment of the divine, then war had to be a regression, as it signified a return to the primitive, instinctive depths of the soul, a "*debasement* of the spirit and the consciousness".⁴⁵³ Gippius refused to join Ivanov and talk about the "universal cause of the war" and attribute to the war a positive religious significance. If a transfiguration of humanity was to occur, it would be in spite of the war and not because of it. The war was a spiritual fall, but even so it had to be accepted and seen through. The alternatives of passivity and rebellion were both rejected by Gippius. To withdraw into oneself and wait passively for an end to the war was an attitude even more immoral than active participation. Everyone bore guilt, as not enough effort had been made to prevent the war. But there were

452 Temira Pachmuss, *Intellect and Ideas in Action: Selected Correspondence of Zinaida Gippius* (Munich, 1972), pp. 27–8.

453 Z.N. Gippius, "Velikii Put", *Golos zhizni* 7 (1914), p. 14. Also published as "Istoriia v khristianstve", in *Zapiski Petrogradskogo religiozno-filosofskogo obshchestva 1915–1916 g.g.*, vol. VI (Petrograd, 1916), pp. 20–8.

also other reasons for accepting the war. Gippius rejected in a condescending manner the plea of the Tolstoyans for non-obedience towards the warring governments: "Children, children! That is not the way to defeat the war!"⁴⁵⁴ To ask the soldiers to refrain from fighting when war was already a fact was an unrealistic and therefore superfluous gesture.⁴⁵⁵ For Gippius and Merezhkovskii the cause of salvation was furthermore a *collective* cause.⁴⁵⁶ There was only a collective road into the future, and the individual had no other choice than to follow the "Great Path", even when it passed through war. More important than the moral level of individuals was that humanity in its entirety manifested will-power and a closeness to the Divine Will.⁴⁵⁷

Ultimately Gippius also left the door open for a positive outcome of the war. Even if universalism as the ultimate goal of mankind was more remote than before, the will for a renewed effort to attain it could be strengthened through the war. The conflagration of the war could be turned into a redemptive and purgatorial act.⁴⁵⁸ Gippius never came to see the war as a guarantee for a bright future, not even in 1917, but only calculated that under certain circumstances it could serve as a spiritual stimulus. What made Gippius different from the genuine pacifists, like the disciples of Tolstoi who came to see her during the war, was that she did not acknowledge the existence of eternal ethical rules, like non-violence. In her opinion this would be equal to a denial of history, freedom and, ultimately, also of God, as every period in the human historical process brought forth new truths, which demanded the overhaul of old ones.⁴⁵⁹ Thus, in 1914, Gippius reserved for herself the right to adjust her opinions according to the historical moment. For those who had accepted the highest truths and values of their time, the situation was painful, as the war forced them to act against their own consciences. The main thing was to be conscious of one's betrayal: "One can and must go with free will, with open eyes, without a wish to forget, without a forcible justification of the unjustifiable, with a feeling of all one's guilt, all one's responsibility."⁴⁶⁰ The war could be accepted without it being justified and without an inner debasement and an outer enthusiasm.

454 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 247.

455 *Ibid.*, p. 263.

456 Zlobin, *A Difficult Soul*, p. 50.

457 Gippius, "Velikii put'", pp. 13-4.

458 *Ibid.*, pp. 15-6.

459 Gippius, "Velikii put'", p. 13.

460 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

It was her own inner split that Gippius raised to a general law. But this tragic ideal had also been put into practice by others. Gippius found a timely word in a letter from an acquaintance, a peasant and factory worker, who had been called to arms. As he was influenced by Tolstoi's ethical Christianity, his choice had been difficult, but in the end he had decided to follow the example of the majority and enlist. His comment was: "My soul has remained faithful to itself. I am only involuntarily resigning myself to the war, as something that has to be done."⁴⁶¹ The same thought is expressed by the hero of Gippius' short story "Not Fabricated" ("Ne vydumannoe"), a fictional rendering of the same event.⁴⁶² The semi-educated village philosopher is a slightly comical figure, but his train of thought is presented as correct. It was possible to participate in the war, both directly like the peasant, or indirectly like the writer Gippius, without intoxicating oneself and renouncing the knowledge that war was something evil. On a national, collective level the same attitude was demonstrated by France. The peace-loving French had been drawn into the war against their will, but they had accepted it and were fighting the enemy bravely without betraying their inner selves.⁴⁶³

The degree of general debasement was most clearly disclosed in the prevailing attitude towards the enemy, and here Gippius not only had in mind the professed differences between Russia and Germany. While it was hard to find any aggressive feelings towards the Germans among the common Russian people, the intelligentsia was driven by blind hatred. Germany was seen as a hydra that had to be exterminated, and nothing but shrill support of the war was acceptable.⁴⁶⁴ Whereas Sologub accused the Russian intelligentsia of being dazzled by Europe and especially by Germany and praised the simple people for their genuine Russian patriotism, Gippius presented the cleavage in quite another light. The intelligentsia's hatred of the enemy and its hysterical, instinct-based chauvinism were foreign to the Russian spirit, while the people's inability to hate was a holy trait.⁴⁶⁵

In a situation where unrestricted emotionalism and lack of moderation dominated the debate, Gippius made depressing national comparisons: "Why are we worse than the English? How is it that they during the same trial are able to preserve a mental equilibrium, a peace of mind, a truly human sense of *measure* in everything, while we sometimes tend to present our lack of

⁴⁶¹ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 236.

⁴⁶² Z. Gippius, "Ne vydumannoe", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 19.10.1914 14442.

⁴⁶³ Gippius, "Svododa".

⁴⁶⁴ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 236.

⁴⁶⁵ Gippius, "V nashi vremena", pp. 11-2.

measure as a virtue?"⁴⁶⁶ When problems were illuminated by feelings and not by reason, the result was that thoughts which in themselves were correct became distorted and vulgarized. Frightened by manifestations of national self-righteousness and a lynching mood against everyone of German stock, Gippius began to put greater stress upon the dangers, as opposed to the advantages, of the Russian imbalance: "If pure mechanization is barbarity, then the overdevelopment of the spiritual side is in the end also a way to barbarity."⁴⁶⁷ It was not ignorance, bad roads and underdeveloped technology that could secure a Russian military victory, but the creation of a Russia that would be materially as advanced as it was spiritually. In this sense the war could provide an impetus for Russia's development, a thought that was later also supported by Sologub.

Leonid Andreev was Gippius' prime example of jingoism,⁴⁶⁸ but a phenomenon more tragic and unexpected for her was that so many of the symbolists had been "hurt" in the war. Sologub, whom Gippius considered one of the leading contemporary Russian writers, gave voice to imperialistic dreams and a violent hatred. Two lines in his poem "March" – "... after a glorious victory/ the nation became a union of tribes..." ("...posle slavnoï pobedy/ Natsiia stala soiuzom plemen...")⁴⁶⁹ – made Gippius warn writers against rejoicing too early ("S liubov'iu"). She ignored Sologub's expressed wish to exert an inspiring influence upon readers through elevated examples, and simply interpreted his poems and short stories as proof of his superficial attitude to the war. Sologub's works also demonstrated for her how drastically his artistic level had fallen during the war. The writer's duty to think and express himself in an independent way had been forgotten, as everyone was repeating the same phrases, from the "impudent Teuton" to "our valiant regiments".⁴⁷⁰ Sologub's *The Edge of the Sword* offered all the clichés of patriotic literature in a concentrated form. "Blessed is he who has not read this story", was Gippius' poignant comment.⁴⁷¹ The neo-Slavophile Viacheslav Ivanov's patriotism was based on the concept of a Holy Russia, political conservatism, a liaison with the Orthodox

466 Gippius, "Iskazheniia", p. 4. Gippius showed the same respect for the English as for the French people during the World War, clearly as antipodes to her well-concealed distrust in the Russian people. In 1915 Gippius participated in discussions about the foundation of a new, more progressive Anglo-Russian Society. (Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 243.)

467 Gippius, "Iskazheniia", p. 4.

468 Zinaida Gippius [pseud. Anton Krainii], "Apogei", *Golos zhizni* 9 (1914), p. 14.

469 Sologub, *Voïna*, p. 8 ("Marsh"). First publ. in *Den'* 7.8.1914 211.

470 Zinaida Gippius [pseud. Anton Krainii], "Ranenaia muza", *Golos zhizni* 24 (1915), p. 1.

471 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

church, and a religious interpretation of the war, and whereas Gippius asked for simplicity and moderation, Ivanov celebrated the events in an elevated, ornate language, using capital letters without any hesitation, as she cuttingly observed.⁴⁷² Without offering much proof, Gippius also dismissed the other symbolists as chauvinists, with the exception of Merezhkovskii. Briusov and, surprisingly, Blok were included *en passant* in a few lines on 28 May 1915: "How repugnant our obligatory literature is! From the very first moment it cried out about the war, as if it had been stabbed with a knife. And with so little talent that one blushes with shame. About A[ndreev, BH] I have nothing to say. But Briusov! And Blok! And everyone in descending order. They could not keep silent. And their punishment was the stamp of talentlessness."⁴⁷³ Long afterwards Gippius would remember Briusov as one of the main chauvinists of wartime Russian literature: "No one glorified the war as stubbornly and 'daringly', year after year, as Briusov. Nobody wrote such crudely chauvinistic poems during the war as Briusov (...)." ⁴⁷⁴ Nor did Gippius forget Bal'mont. In a poem "Let Us Not Be Like the Sun" ("Ne budem kak solntse", 1915), a title directed polemically at Bal'mont's famous "Let Us Be Like the Sun" ("Budem kak solntse", 1903), she remarked that true freedom was not to be found in physical strength.

Gippius' criticism of her colleagues was biased and, like her image of the Russian people, based upon simplifications. It was a glaring injustice to characterize the wartime writings of Briusov and Blok, in itself a very ill-matched pair, as untalented. Briusov supported the war and dreamed of Russian greatness, but he was not a glorifier of war as such. Bal'mont juxtaposed spiritual and physical strength in his contemporary poems, seeing them as respectively divine and satanic. Behind Gippius' crusade against what she saw as a bestial nationalism and a lack of understanding of the tragic nature of the war, one suspects an attempt to appease her own conscience. Aware of her betrayal of her inner convictions, she projected her guilt upon others. It became more urgent to draw dividing lines than to emphasize the common wish for victory. Gippius saw Merezhkovskii and Aleksandr Kerenskii, a regular visitor to her salon, as her only sympathizers.

Gippius' view of the function of art during war reveals the same split between idealism and realism as there was in her general outlook on war. Here, too, the stress is on the inner, agonizing conflict as an ethical postulate. In

472 Zinaida Gippius [pseud. Anton Krainii], "Skazhite priamo!", *Golos zhizni* 3 (1915), pp. 5-6.

473 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 247.

474 *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 55.

the anthology *What Russia Can Expect from the War* (*Chego zhdet Rossiia ot voiny*, 1915), Gippius emphasized that true art should be above life. Even if a genuinely creative work could not be detached from the present moment, the artist should depict the depths of reality rather than its surface. By uniting the past, the present and the future, he could touch upon the eternal, while art which tried to please the crowd's demands for topicality ceased to be genuine art.⁴⁷⁵ In Gippius' words there were distinct echoes of the symbolist revolt against the socio-political overtones of Russian literature that had once led to a lowering of artistic standards. Primarily a philosophical and religious poet, she feared that the present moment would lead to a revival of a purely utilitarian approach to art.

However, Gippius also saw an insuperable conflict with reality within the sphere of symbolist aesthetics. The writer was first of all a human being and only second an artist. As a human being he lived in the present, reacting and being influenced like everybody else. Conflicts with the ideal of true art were, as a result, unavoidable. The normal condition for a writer during war was therefore a perpetual struggle between the human being and the artist. Despair at human barbarity was challenged by the temptation to surrender to hatred for the enemy. This was how the artist "through his suffering atoned for the sin of living in the void, *between* life and creative work, neither here, nor there".⁴⁷⁶ A writer who tried to combine both roles by writing fiction about topical subjects was, on the contrary, betraying art. The result was neither life, nor art, merely pseudo-art.⁴⁷⁷ This was not only true of those who succumbed to their instincts and stirred up feelings of hatred, as Gippius considered it psychologically impossible to give a true picture of a war in progress because of personal involvement. The writer was doomed to be an outsider at the decisive moments in history, caught by the clash between his two incompatible roles.

In the face of the true drama of war, realistic art with its mimetic character was furthermore superfluous. It was fiction, and thus *a priori* of less value than any authentic document. This implied also that the attempt of fiction to create synthesis by selection and arrangement was doomed to failure, while genuine

475 Gippius, "Voyna, literatura, teatr", p. 94; Gippius, "V nashi vremena", p. 11.

476 Gippius, "Voyna, literatura, teatr", p. 97.

477 *Ibid.* Gippius herself was to illustrate blatantly the defeat of the artist in 1920 in connection with the Russian-Polish War. In Poland, under the pseudonym Anton Kirsha, she published a booklet, *Pokhodnye pesni*, containing simple and artistically primitive songs for the Russian regiment which was to march at the head of the Polish army when conquering Moscow.

value could only be found in the fragmentary documents of the time. In her manifesto “The War, Literature, Theatre” (“Voina, literatura, teatr”), Gippius asked rhetorically: “Really, does not any ‘contemporary’ short story by any, even the most talented contemporary writer fade alongside a letter from an illiterate soldier? One should not invent something lifelike at a time when life itself speaks, cries out with a deafening roar.”⁴⁷⁸

As if trying to prove her thesis, in the spring of 1915 Gippius edited a book of soldiers’ letters, *How We Wrote to the Warriors and What They Replied to Us* (*Kak my voinam pisali i chto oni nam otvechali*). However, these truly simple letters hardly proved her to be right. Authentic in the sense that they were written by non-professionals and not intended for publication, the letters were not authentic as far as content and style were concerned. The soldiers clearly did not have a language of their own to express their feelings and thoughts, and the overall result was as stereotypical and banal as the fictional works that Gippius had set out to unmask. In the soldiers’ letters, written surprisingly often in rhymed form, the same “brave cossacks” fought against the same “impudent, base Prussians”. The anonymous authors displayed more of a callous rawness than the gentleness Gippius had claimed to be typical for the Russian soldier: “Send us tobacco, and we will give the Germans a bloody nose” (“Vy prishlite nam papiros, a my razob'em germantsu v krov' nos”),⁴⁷⁹ or “I send you my heartfelt thanks and bravely beat the German beast” (“Serdechno Vas blagodariu i nemtsa zveria khrabro b'iu”).⁴⁸⁰ The dreams of the soldiers were even more unrealistic than those of Sologub in his much-criticised poem “Comfort to Belgium”: “We hit the German in his mug every day; we want to get all the way to Berlin and wait there for peace, and have fun with the German women, especially the young ones.” (“Germantsu mordu b'em kazhdyi den', khotim do Berlina dobrat'sia i mira tam dozhdat'sia, da poguliat' s nemkami, da s molo-den'kami.”)⁴⁸¹ If one adds to this a general, unreflective loyalty towards the tsar, it is a riddle why Gippius agreed to edit the book in the first place.⁴⁸²

478 *Ibid.*, pp. 97–8.

479 Z. Gippius (ed.), *Kak my voinam pisali i chto oni nam otvechali: Kniga-podarok* (Moscow, 1915), p. 35.

480 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

481 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

482 An answer is offered by Olga Matich (*Paradox in the Religious Poetry of Zinaida Gippius* (Munich, 1972), p. 19), who, with little substantial proof, claims that the volume *Kak my voinam pisali i chto oni nam otvechali* was a “tongue-in-cheek” publication, a “playful hoax” with all verses composed by Gippius alone. It is, however, difficult to see what would have been the motives behind writing pseudo-popular verses at such an amount, as the possible parodic element was definitely lost.

Pure “war literature” not only antagonized true art, but Gippius also questioned it from an ethical point of view. The war was a tragedy, and those who were directly touched by it could only regard art, fictional by its nature, as something offensive. Fiction could not add anything to the existing sorrow, but could only debase it. “It is a sin to write poems now”, Gippius wrote in her diary in December 1914.⁴⁸³ A feeling of shame before the soldiers’ mothers even made her call into question her own profession. Doubt not only in the power of fiction, but also in the word as such had logically to end in praise of silence. Gippius was indeed several times to acclaim “the wisdom of silence” but, paradoxically, even her doubt in poetry was expressed in poetic form, as in “With Love” (“S liubov’iu”), later called “Be silent” (“Tishe”), “Rest” (“Otdykh”) and “On Poland”. In other words, an unsettled inner dialogue was present here as well, this time between the creative urge and the ethical imperative of silence. Silence was in this connection not a sign of passivity, but a truly religious condition.⁴⁸⁴

Considering Gippius’ many arguments against “war literature”, it is surprising how substantial her own contribution to the genre was. Her major work of the period, the play *The Green Ring* (*Zelenoe kol’tso*, 1915), dealt with pre-war Russia, but either under her own name or using the pseudonym Anton Krainii, she also published, in addition to articles, several short stories and poems explicitly linked to the war. In the journal *Golos zhizni* she had an organ more or less of her own. Her close friend Dmitrii Filosofov functioned as one of the editors, and the list of contributors consisted mainly of writers from her circle of acquaintances. *Golos zhizni* cannot be called an anti-war journal, but it did function as a counterweight to *Otechestvo* and other professedly patriotic journals. Gippius’ short stories, cautiously called “artistic sketches”, are embarrassingly weak. However, unlike Sologub, she was wise enough not to have them published in book form. Her much stronger “war poems” were all included in her last book to be published in Russia prior to emigration, *Last Poems* (*Poslednie stikhi*, 1918).

It has been maintained that Gippius set out to devote her energy and influence as a writer to end the war.⁴⁸⁵ This claim corresponds neither to the general situation in 1914, nor to Gippius’ own basic convictions. Trapped as she was between an aversion to war and an acceptance of the war as an inescapable reality, between distrust of the written word and an irresistible wish

483 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 239.

484 K.M. Azadovskii, A.V. Lavrov, “Z.N. Gippius: Metafizika, lichnost’, tvorchestvo”, in Z.N. Gippius, *Sochineniia* (Leningrad, 1991), p. 13.

485 Pachmuss, *Zinaida Hippius*, p. 182.

to participate in the debate, she was unable to devote her energy wholly to anything except criticism of Russian chauvinism. Furthermore, it was not in her interest to stir up anti-war feelings, as she had in fact accepted the necessity of a victory of the Allied Powers.

Gippius' main problem was not censorship, even if she repeatedly complained in her diary in the spring of 1915 about the increasing activity of the censors. The degree of censorship in a text is not a reliable indicator of a writer's radical attitude to the war. Leonid Andreev's collection of articles, *In This Menacing Hour* (*V sei groznyi chas*, 1915), was more heavily censored than the complete corpus of Gippius' articles, even though he was more active than her in supporting Russia's military effort. Gippius was in fact able to present her view of the war without any great difficulty – with the reservation that questions relating to domestic politics could not be touched upon. Why so many of her "war poems" were only published in 1918 is unclear. Perhaps Gippius feared that poems like "Adonai", "To the Young Century" ("Molodomu veku") and "On the Earth Today" ("Segodnia na zemle") would not pass the censorship and therefore decided to hold them back until the situation had changed. As a result, these poems were deprived of any possible influence.

An essential part of Gippius' crusade against Russian chauvinism was the struggle against anti-Semitic and anti-German sentiments in Russia. Being herself partly of foreign background she reacted with pain to the irrational hunt for German elements in Russia. A revealing example of the psychological results of this witch-hunt can be found in the book of soldiers' letters Gippius edited in 1915, when a soldier writes: "Excuse me if I wrote badly as I am, unfortunately, of German origin."⁴⁸⁶ A German-sounding name was sometimes enough to make a person seem suspicious. In Gippius' short story "Torment" ("Muchenie") a small Petrograd clerk wants to demonstrate his patriotism and protect himself against problems at work by changing his German surname to a genuinely Russian one.⁴⁸⁷ If this was the tragicomical side of the problem, then the short story "The German" ("Nemets") gives a lesson in tolerance. Young Valia is for a short time forced to see life from the point of view of the weak and persecuted. He is a patriot who dreams of enlisting, but when he is dubbed a "German" by his school-mates, his whole world collapses. The evidence against him is his foreign surname, Lutheran faith and excellent marks in German language. Gippius' intention was honourable, but she did not manage to carry it through, as an unintended trace of Great Russian chauvinism

⁴⁸⁶ Gippius, *Kak my voimam pisali...*, p. 55.

⁴⁸⁷ Z. Gippius, "Muchenie", *Birzhevy vedomosti* 4.1.1915 14590. First publ. in *Birzhevy vedomosti* 4.1.1915 14550.

appeared at the end. Valia learns from his mother that they are not Germans, but Latvians. The boy fears that this answer will not impress his classmates and asks uneasily: "All Latvians are Russians, aren't they?" His mother's answer is reassuring: "They are all Russians, my dear boy. They have always been and always will be Russians." Out of a wish to defend her son from persecution by his comrades, the mother instead denies another nation its identity. Her attempt to make the boy understand that Germans living in Russia can be good people ends in her depriving them of their human dignity: "It is not their fault that they have been born that way (...)." ⁴⁸⁸

"The German" is not the only example of how Gippius sometimes goes against her own aims in her short stories. In "The Great Path" Gippius called the war a regression both on a national and individual level, but the tendency in the short story "Everything Has Changed" ("Vse peremenilos") demonstrates the very opposite, an exclusively positive influence of the war. The officer Nestor Dobrovol'skii returns crippled from the war and his beautiful but superficial fiancée Mara Kniazhnina deserts him. As in Sologub's short stories, the war breaks up false relationships, while laying the basis for genuine and lasting bonds. Dobrovol'skii finds a new sweetheart in a friend from his childhood, Manechka, who shows a correct attitude to the war by working at a military hospital. Gippius does not confine herself to praising the war as a matrimonial agent, but turns it into a gateway through which individuals and even mankind pass into a transformed existence. Manechka is already part of this new life, but Dobrovol'skii only reaches it through the war. How his world view changes remains unclear, as Dobrovol'skii is unable to transmit his most profound experiences: "Don't ask me how it happened, don't ask me about the war! I would not be able to say anything, because I don't know such words." ⁴⁸⁹ This confession also means the defeat of Gippius as a writer, and "Everything Has Changed" cannot but leave the reader dissatisfied.

Another even more curious apology for a war which Gippius herself claimed to hate, was "A Strange Law" ("Strannyi zakon"). The story's *raison d'être* was to present "the law of humankind's adaptation to historical catastrophes". ⁴⁹⁰ Nature anticipates the future and prepares for coming events on a physical level. If the pre-war generation in Western Europe and Russia displayed "sterility, languor, restlessness", the explanation was neither social nor political, as it was nature that was preparing for war by forming the necessary

488 Z. Gippius, "Nemets", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 30.11.1914 14526.

489 Z.N. Gippius, "Vse peremenilos", *Golos zhizni* 8 (1914), p. 8.

490 Z. Gippius, "Strannyi zakon", *Golos zhizni* 4 (1915), p. 5.

type of human beings. As a result, the majority of 20-25-year-old men were unfit for anything other than war. It is a scholar, a famous professor, who presents the thesis of the short story and illustrates its application. Of his three sons, the eldest and the youngest are fighting in the war, while the middle one is studying. The father had, without any hesitation, helped his youngest son, only 13 years old, to enter the war as a volunteer, as the boy's disposition revealed that in reality he belonged to the "war generation", but had merely been born too late. The situation leaves no room for emotion, as man is primarily in the service of higher powers: "They were not born for me, nor for themselves", the professor explains, "but for the inevitable worldwide struggle."⁴⁹¹

With its deterministic and basically inhuman tendency, "A Strange Law" is in conflict with Gippius' general view of the war, although its disregard for individual fates and preference for collective solutions can be seen as characteristic for the majority of Russian symbolists. In her tale Gippius uses a narrator, an old friend of the professor, whose task is only to express astonishment and to question, not to establish a dialogue. At the end, he succumbs and admits the depth of the "strange law", which seems to reveal how much God cares for the world. The oppositional voice in "A Strange Law" belongs to a priest, a profession with a low status in Gippius' hierarchy. For the priest it is blasphemous to call the professor's theory one of God's laws. The Russian censors reacted in a similar way, when the short story was later to be reprinted in an anthology. Not only were the passages about the mother's sorrow and worry eliminated, but so also was a biblical quotation which gave the main thesis of the story divine sanction: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Romans 9:21) As it turned out, in this particular case it was the censors who tried to lessen Gippius' apology for the war.

At the other end of the scale one finds the short story "A Child's Gaze" ("Detskii vzor"), memories from a childhood at the time of the Russo-Turkish War. The child's naive questions are used as a defamiliarization device. All that is clear and simple for the adults is questioned by the child, and as a result a concrete humanism emerges from the war's abstractions.⁴⁹²

The causes and goals of the war lay outside man's understanding in "A Strange Law". Gippius' attitude is the same in her poems. Man can only pray for a quick end to the war. Gippius had already developed the prayer as a poetic genre, which consisted of a dialogue with God and eternity about essential

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁹² Z. Gippius, "Detskii vzor: Vospominaniia kstati", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 31.10.1915 15181.

questions of human existence.⁴⁹³ Gippius' prayers of 1914 concerned peace. Her two Christmas poems, "White" ("Beloe", 1914)⁴⁹⁴ and "Second Christmas" ("Vtoroe Rozhdestvo", 1915)⁴⁹⁵ are both prayers that the word of God would find its way into people's hearts. In "Adonai", God is called to account for the war and is asked in the name of all mothers to show mercy on the suffering world and prevent men from killing each other.⁴⁹⁶ It is the "bloody God of revenge and wrath" that Gippius addresses, but this does not mean that she is rebelling against her own religious beliefs. The poems can be said to serve as an illustration of Merezhkovskii's thought that the war was a result of man having discarded Christ from Christianity.⁴⁹⁷ Instead of passing from the New Testament to the Third and ultimate Testament, humankind has returned to the Old Testament, that is to a Christianity without Christ and love. That Gippius is appealing to the God of the Old Testament can also be seen from the title of the poem. Adonai, Hebrew for "My Lord", is a word that was used by the Jews to avoid profaning the name of God. The thought that the war signified a return to already abandoned positions was also expressed in "To the Young Century" ("Molodomu veku").⁴⁹⁸

In August 1914, Gippius gave the war her blessing with the words, "as the war is already a fact, I now wish for a victory of the Allied Powers".⁴⁹⁹ It would have been more natural to talk about a Russian victory, but behind the formulation lay a conflict that could only be expressed in her diary. Gippius' revolutionary ardour was still alive, and she found it impossible to wish for a victory of the tsarist regime. Even Russian patriotism as such was problematic under prevailing circumstances. "What is a fatherland?" she asked in her diary on 2 August. "The people or the state? Both together. But what if I hate the Russian *state*? What if it is against my people on this earth?"⁵⁰⁰ Gippius had this dilemma in mind, when she later wrote in her diary that Russia in 1914 was struck by a double misfortune, a visible outer and a hidden inner one.⁵⁰¹ The German declaration of war had brought to a head the unresolved, and even insoluble, conflict between the regime and the people. This was the Russian tragedy, hidden and inexplicable to other nations.

493 E. Kurganov, "Dekadentskaia madonna", in Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 14.

494 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, pp. 134-5 ("Beloe").

495 *Ibid.*, pp. 141-2 ("Vtoroe Rozhdestvo"). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 25.12.1915 15290.

496 *Ibid.*, p. 132 ("Adonai").

497 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 188 ("Dva Islama").

498 *Ibid.*, p. 135 ("Molodomu veku").

499 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

500 *Ibid.*

501 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

Gippius' unwillingness to support the Russian regime had to be hidden from the public. By praising the French revolution and the love of freedom nurtured by the French people⁵⁰² and by talking vaguely about the changes of the inner and outer forms of life that the war might bring about,⁵⁰³ she could only hint at her political position. This question was instead discussed in the salon held by Merezhkovskii and Gippius, where not only writers, philosophers and theologians, but also statesmen, politicians and revolutionaries came together during the war.

The question of political power had a direct connection with the war. Gippius saw it as an illusion to believe that it was the Russian people who were fighting, while the government was merely supporting. On the contrary, it was the regime that was waging war, while the people were only assisting.⁵⁰⁴ At the beginning of the war many had rejoiced at the national unity and the release of liberal forces and predicted that a victory achieved through the effort of the whole nation would lead to political and social reforms. Gippius clearsightedly doubted the possibility of a lasting alliance between the regime and progressive national forces. Contrary to all predictions, a victorious war could just as well lead to a strengthening of Russian autocracy.⁵⁰⁵ There were risks in the liberals assisting a rotten regime, which on the one hand was not interested in receiving any help, but on the other could not wage the war alone. The slogan "All for the war!" might in reality mean "Nothing for a victory!", as a truly united Russian war effort was as yet impossible.⁵⁰⁶

Even if Gippius had accepted the reality of the war, many of her acquaintances still considered her to be defeatist.⁵⁰⁷ The reason was most probably not so much her criticism of Russian chauvinism as the fact that she demanded radical political changes during the course of the war. While the general feeling was that all internal conflicts had to be temporarily forgotten, Gippius sought confrontation. As the dream of political reforms naturally merged with the wish for a German defeat, the label "defeatist" does not do justice to her position.

Gippius and Merezhkovskii did not belong to any political party, but they had friends and acquaintances in most parties. They personally knew many of the wartime ministers and statesmen, and through Dmitrii Filosofov they also

⁵⁰² Gippius, "Svoboda".

⁵⁰³ Gippius, "Voina, literatura, teatr", pp. 99, 101.

⁵⁰⁴ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 244.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 261-2, 272, 329.

had active contacts with the Constitutional Democrats. However, as during the 1905 Revolution, Gippius' sympathies were on the side of the Socialist Revolutionaries. The Constitutional Democrats supported monarchism and the Social Democrats believed in economic materialism, and together they made the mistake of seeing Russia as part of Europe. The program of the Socialist Revolutionaries, by contrast, took into consideration both Russia's unique past and her present situation.⁵⁰⁸

It was political action and not literature that could change reality. In the spring of 1915 the possibility of the formation of a new party, a "radical democratic party", was discussed in the Merezhkovskii-Gippius salon. Contrary to the so-called Progressive Bloc, in which the liberals were in alliance with the Right, this party was intended to unite those who stood between the Constitutional Democrats and the Left, mostly moderate Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries. Among those invited to discuss the issue were Aleksandr Kerenskii, Gippius' closest ally in the political field, and Maksim Gor'kii. Gippius saw Gor'kii as a *former* Social Democrat and was clearly impressed by his opposition to the war. As one of the main forces behind the initiative, Gippius also participated in the writing of a party program in May 1915. However, nothing came of the plan. The time was not yet ripe, even though the idea that only a democratization of Russia could secure a military victory was growing stronger.

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii: How to Overcome the War

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii waited a few weeks longer than Gippius to make his first public comment on the war. His choice of genre – aphorism – might seem surprising, but in many respects, it was the most appropriate for him. Aphorisms presuppose a depth of thought and a spiritual authority that Merezhkovskii indeed possessed, but the fragmentary form can also betray hesitation and uncertainty.

Merezhkovskii's basic conviction was that war was absurd and unjustifiable, hostile to man's loftiest aspirations. He had earlier opposed war on religious grounds, comparing support of war to a renewed crucifixion of Christ. Yet Merezhkovskii was not consistent in his pacifism,⁵⁰⁹ something which can be clearly seen from the difficulty he had in taking an unambiguous stand on the war. Merezhkovskii accepted this dilemma as inescapable and deeply human. In one of his aphorisms he addressed the psychological conflict caused

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁵⁰⁹ Rosenthal, pp. 174-5.

by the war: "Human reason can cope with everything except for meaninglessness. War against war, war for peace – that is the meaning."⁵¹⁰ The senselessness of war had to be consciously overcome by the repetition of noble slogans. It was initially a question of a necessary mental defence and conscious self-deception but, as the case of Merezhkovskii was to demonstrate, there was an obvious risk that declarations would eventually become genuine convictions.

Pacifism was a theory, while the war was an inescapable reality. The very fact of its existence made all abstract principles seem meaningless. Merezhkovskii expressed the predicament concisely: "You have to be a fool to shout, 'Down with the war!'. You have to be crazy to shout, 'Hurrah for the war!'"⁵¹¹ War was a madness that afflicted everyone, whether you welcomed or rejected it. Together with Zinaida Gippius, Merezhkovskii tried to find a middle way, a painful acceptance of the war, mingled with hope for the ultimate salvation of humankind.

Of all the symbolists, Merezhkovskii had the most clearly defined view of world history and the meaning of human existence. Through the war and revolution, he remained true to the apocalyptic belief that he had formulated in, for example, *Tolstoi and Dostoevskii* (*Tolstoi i Dostoevskii*, 1900–02), "The Coming Brute" ("Griadushchii Kham", 1905), "The Prophet of the Russian Revolution" ("Prorok russkoi revoliutsii", 1906) and *Not Peace but the Sword* (*Ne mir, no mech*, 1908). This was the platform from which he viewed the war and the future that was born out of the war.

The goal of humanity was world-wide, supranational unification. Throughout history there had existed the dream of establishing such a universal humanity. The Roman Empire, Christendom, the French Revolution and socialism all bore witness to this striving. Attempts at unification were sometimes made at the level of the state and sometimes at the level of human reason.⁵¹² However, according to Merezhkovskii, no true sociality was possible without religion. The ultimate aim was, therefore, the establishment of a Universal Church, permeated by Christian sociality.

Merezhkovskii distinguished between three religious revelations or testaments: the Old Testament (the revelation of God the Father), the New Testament (the revelation of God the Son), and an approaching, third Testament, which would reveal God the Holy Ghost. The first had concerned one nation – the people of Israel – and expressed love of the Earth. The appearance of

⁵¹⁰ Merezhkovskii, "Mysli o voine".

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, pp. 123–5 ("O religioznoi lzhi natsionalisma").

Christ represented a transition towards absolute individuality.⁵¹³ Christ, the God-Man, was at the centre of the New Testament, which expressed love for Heaven. In the future Kingdom of the Holy Ghost, love for the earth and for Heaven, for the World and for God were to be one. Instead of God in the world and God within man, Godmanhood (*Bogochelovechestvo*) would emerge. In the first stage existing states would dissolve and nations would renounce their unique character and merge into an all-humanity (*vsechelovechestvo*) permeated by universality (*vsemirnost'*).⁵¹⁴ Godmanhood would mean the end of all contradictions and complete equality between knowledge and belief, flesh and spirit, the human and the divine.⁵¹⁵ The establishment of a theocratic society, the goal of Merezhkovskii's apocalyptic Christianity, would be the end of history.⁵¹⁶

Merezhkovskii envisioned a future Kingdom of God on earth, but at the same time he feared the realization of its alternative, the Kingdom of the Beast.⁵¹⁷ The war initially confirmed his darkest misgivings. Instead of a universal unification in Christian love, discord and hate reigned everywhere. The war came as a bloody wave, threatening to annihilate the whole of European culture, a catastrophe that in the eyes of the Europe-centred Merezhkovskii was equal to the destruction of the world.

The first explanation Merezhkovskii gave of the events took the form of a simile. Just as the ocean liner the Titanic had met its fate in its collision with an iceberg, Europe had run into an unmelted block of barbarity.⁵¹⁸ Barbarity had seemed to be defeated, but instead it turned out still to exist on a gigantic scale. The demoralization that the war gave expression to was a sign of cultural crisis. Disregarding economic and political explanations, Merezhkovskii singled out absolute individualism and absolute nationalism as the two ultimate factors behind the war. Both had a distorted religious aspect, as the ultimate stage of individualism was the religion of mangodhood (*chelovekobožhestvo*) and nationalism bordered on the religion of people-godhood (*narodobožhestvo*).⁵¹⁹ Since they affirmed strictly individual and national truths, they counteracted humanity's striving towards a universal unification and therefore signified a step away from Christ.

513 Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 232 ("Rozanov").

514 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, pp. 56, 59 ("Raspiatyti narod").

515 Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 158 ("Zemnoi Khristos").

516 Bedford, pp. 105-6.

517 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 216 ("Ispolnenie tserkvi").

518 Merezhkovskii, "Mysli o voine".

519 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 59 ("Raspiatyti narod").

Merezhkovskii discussed nationalism in a talk, "About the Religious Lie of Nationalism" ("O religioznoi lzhi natsionalizma"), that he gave in October 1914 in Petrograd's Religious-Philosophical Society. Behind the war that posed a threat not only to European culture, but also to the notion of a Godmanhood, he saw the phenomenon of absolute nationalism. Like patriotism, nationalism stemmed from a love for one's people and fatherland, but whereas the patriot admitted the limitations and relativity of national truth, the nationalist deified his own people and considered the national truth absolute and universal.⁵²⁰

Even patriotic feelings had remained alien to Merezhkovskii because of his hatred for autocracy. This basically tragic predicament, that Gippius also mentioned in her diary, was presented by Merezhkovskii as typical for the Russian intelligentsia in general. They loved the ideal Russia but detested its existing forms. As a result, the intelligentsia found itself in opposition to the people, as the people perceived autocracy as the essence of Russia and the tsar's powers as God-given. Only a paradox could do justice to the situation: In autocratic Russia the real patriots were those who rejected patriotism.⁵²¹

On humanity's path towards a universal Christian unity, patriotism was an inevitable stage, even if universalism meant a "higher religious affirmation and overcoming of the national aspect".⁵²² Merezhkovskii also discovered in himself, at the outbreak of the war, an unexpected and strong love of Russia. He felt Russia to be the body, the basis, without which no individual life was possible. Still, whereas other writers found it natural to express their love of Russia in poetic form, Merezhkovskii advocated silence: "At the moment one ought not talk about one's love for one's native country. When the life of his beloved is in danger, he who loves does not talk about love."⁵²³ Patriotism was so holy that it should and could not be expressed in words.

Contrary to patriotism, nationalism conflicted with Christianity, and throughout history it had caused the failure of all attempts at universal unification. By its very nature, nationalism was connected with the state, and it inevitably led to hatred, bestiality and murder. Before the war, Merezhkovskii had already expressed similar thoughts, citing the chauvinism of Dostoevskii and the anti-Semitism of Tiutchev as examples of the evil fruits of nation-

520 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 125 ("O religioznoj lzhi natsionalizma"). First publ. in *Golos zhizni* 4 (1914), pp. 22-4. See also D. Merezhkovskii, "Natsionalizm pred sudom religii: Otvet N.A. Gredeskulu", *Birzhevyiye vedomosti* 3.11.1914 14472.

521 Merezhkovskii, "Est' Rossiia".

522 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 60 ("Raspiaty narod").

523 Merezhkovskii, "Mysli o voine".

alism. "A nation is just like a man", he wrote in the article "Nationalism and religion" ("Natsionalizm i religiiia") of 1911, "in order to see the face of the beast in another nation, it must itself become brutalized, lose its human visage. 'Nationalism' is indeed the call to brutality."⁵²⁴ If nationalism was the soul, then militarism and imperialism were the body.⁵²⁵ In the final analysis, nationalism was equal to atheism.⁵²⁶

Individualism meant, as did nationalism, that the part replaced the whole, and that what was in actuality relative was raised to something absolute. The problem of individualism was also examined by Merezhkovskii in connection with religion. His criticism of historical Christianity had initially been directed against Roman Catholicism, but was later expanded to include Orthodoxy as well.⁵²⁷ In the war Merezhkovskii widened his scope still further as he turned his gaze towards Protestantism. In the same spirit as the contemporary neo-Slavophiles, he perceived German Protestantism as a rational, restrained and perverted form of religion. Christianity had been turned human and become easily accessible, and no room was left for a true, divine Christ. Merezhkovskii referred to the Polish writer Adam Mickiewicz, who had already warned of the social consequences of Protestantism in the 1840's. Individualism had given birth to the Reformation and to Protestantism, and they in their turn led to rationalism, political reaction and cultural barbarism. Instead of being a common cause influencing all spheres of man's life, religion was turned into a private affair.⁵²⁸ The notion of a Universal Church was rejected as a utopia, impossible to achieve. As a rejection of the Church, that is the unification of all men in God, the individualism of Protestantism signified a step backwards on humanity's path.⁵²⁹

Merezhkovskii saw the war as a global tragedy, a purgatory for the whole of mankind, but when it came to defining its roots more closely, even he maintained that Germany bore greater responsibility than the other nations involved. It was in Germany that Lutheranism had come to oppress man's inner life and foster absolute individualism. The German people had also wholeheartedly adopted the idea of nationalism, and for them the limited truth of the individual and the nation had become a substitute for the broader truth of humankind. The state had replaced the Church as the basis for the

⁵²⁴ Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, pp. 258-9 ("Natsionalizm i religiiia").

⁵²⁵ Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennnyi dnevnik*, p. 126 ("O religioznoi lzhi natsionalizma").

⁵²⁶ Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 258 ("Natsionalizm i religiiia").

⁵²⁷ Bedford, pp. 93 ff.

⁵²⁸ Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennnyi dnevnik*, p. 55-6 ("Raspiaty narod").

⁵²⁹ Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennnyi dnevnik*, p. 217 ("Ispolnenie tserkvi").

unification of man. For Merezhkovskii, this was equal to the triumph of the Antichrist.⁵³⁰

Unlimited individualism and nationalism had given birth to a false culture in Germany. At the national level, the “spirit of enlightened barbarity” was expressed in the form of bureaucracy, militarism and imperialism, while at the individual level it emerged as a lapse into savagery. At the beginning of the war, Merezhkovskii was agitated not only by the German shelling of architectural monuments, but also by Allied reports about the poisoning of wells, the use of sawtoothed bayonets and the torture of prisoners and children. Merezhkovskii initially gave an ethnic explanation to these shocking acts of violence. It was the “Blond Beast”, the ancient German barbarian, that Nietzsche had referred to in his *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887), which had risen out of his abyss.⁵³¹

Merezhkovskii was forced to conclude that the Germany he loved, the Germany of Goethe and Schiller, had disappeared. The “demonic face” of modern Germany had concealed old cultural values. When declaring war upon the whole Christian world in the name of Christ, Wilhelm II had put Nietzsche's thoughts into practice.⁵³² This was a symptom of the madness which would ultimately destroy modern Germany. The Allied Powers were not fighting against the genuine German nation, which was a great, Christian people, but against its double, a “false phantom”. In this sense the war was a war of liberation, and German's only way to the truth led through crucifixion.⁵³³

Merezhkovskii was visibly disturbed by the fact that the war was taking place mainly within the Christian world. If the war was an internal Christian affair, the possibility of it leading to the emergence of an all-humanity seemed insignificant indeed. A way out of the dilemma was to reveal hidden, non-European spiritual powers behind the events. While Ivanov was to put the blame on the positivism of the Orient, Merezhkovskii singled out Islam. Turkey had occupied a modest place in the philosophy of the old Slavophiles, as it had been outside the East-West opposition. For Merezhkovskii it was, on the contrary, precisely in Ottoman Turkey that the true East-West conflict found concrete expression. He repudiated the Slavophile East-West concept as a delusion,⁵³⁴ but was trapped in a similar polarized way of thinking because of his old antipathy towards Islam. If the Russian-German struggle was indeed

530 *Ibid.*, pp. 194-5 (“Zhelezo pod molotom”).

531 Merezhkovskii, “Mysli o voine”.

532 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 187 (“Dva Islama”).

533 *Ibid.*, pp. 193-5 (“Zhelezo pod molotom”).

534 Bedford (p. 143) wrongly ascribes to Merezhkovskii the notion of a divided Europe. It was not Merezhkovskii but Adam Mickiewicz who saw Europe as strictly divided into

part of a long historical tradition, it was as a new phase in the struggle between the Christian West and the Muslim East.

The alliance between Christian Germany and Muslim Turkey was not only political, but also had deep spiritual and apocalyptic significance. On a metaphysical level Protestantism and Islam were so close that Merezhkovskii saw them as doubles and talked about “the two Islams”.⁵³⁵ Both were rational and moderate reform religions which represented a step backwards in the development of mankind. Protestants and Muslims did not obey God but man, and a godless nationalism had therefore come to exist in both Germany and Turkey. Germany and Turkey were also united by their attitude to war as such. The notion of a “Holy War” played a greater role in Islam than in any other religion. The fact that the Germans also regarded the war as holy was unforgivable, as war and Christianity were irreconcilable. War could not be accepted within Christianity without an inner conflict, as a true Christian fought for peace, while the Moslems fought for the sake of war: “Islam lives by war; Christianity is *overcoming* war.” (“Islam zhivet voinoiu; khristianstvo voinu izzhivaet.”)⁵³⁶

The strength of Merezhkovskii's wartime activity lies in the fact that, despite his biased denunciation of Germany, he still came to devote most of his energy to national self-criticism. It is not quite correct to say that he eventually came to view the war as a “religious war (...) between Christian civilization and German barbarism”.⁵³⁷ Germany alone was not guilty of the war, because all nations had been guilty of a nationalism that bordered on cruelty, aggression and imperialism.⁵³⁸ To interpret the war as one between two opposites, as the neo-Slavophiles did, Merezhkovskii regarded as hypocrisy: “Our indignation at ‘the German atrocities’ is like the indignation of cannibals at those who eat human flesh almost raw.”⁵³⁹ The moral degradation of war was only a question of differences of degree, and therefore this war was not a “Holy War”.

two cultures, even into two “humankinds”. In them intuition stood against rationalism, a living Christianity against a dead religion, insight against mechanics, man against “ape”. (Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, pp. 54-5 / “Raspiaty narod” /.)

535 As Bedford (p. 143) has pointed out, Merezhkovskii was not disturbed by the fact that the Roman Catholic Austria and Hungary were also part of the Central Powers. This tendency to belittle the role of Austria-Hungary came to express most Russian comments about the First World War. In Merezhkovskii's case it was also a question of a preference for grand schemes.

536 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 187 (“Dva Islama”).

537 Rosenthal, p. 204.

538 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 125 (“O religioznoi lzhi natsionalizma”).

539 *Ibid.*, p. 175 (“Voina i religiia”).

While the general trend among the symbolists was to define themselves as prophets of a world-wide cataclysm, Merezhkovskii unexpectedly singled out Russian symbolism as one of the negative phenomena behind the war. An absolute individualism, or the “self-assertion of the lonely individual”, had been expressed precisely by the symbolists, or the “decadents”, as Merezhkovskii preferred to call his old allies.⁵⁴⁰ Bal'mont, Belyi, Blok, Briusov and Gippius⁵⁴¹ had reflected attitudes in their works that existed in reality, but they had simultaneously, partly under the influence of Nietzsche, promoted individualism, a “suicidal loneliness” and a lack of sociality.⁵⁴² The loneliest among the lonely was Blok, but he had also been the first to realize the inherent dangers and to repent.⁵⁴³ Merezhkovskii also found positive signs of a move “from isolation to unification, from the self to all” in the works of his wife, Gippius.⁵⁴⁴ Merezhkovskii could also have used himself as an example of a “repentant symbolist”. Having begun as one of the “solitaries” who found strength and bliss precisely in isolation from others, he had only later turned to collective utopias.⁵⁴⁵ Art should also be subordinated to the universal, supranational goal of history. Opposing the aesthetics of decadence, the irreligious confirmation of the individual and his subjective values, Merezhkovskii spoke for a culture that promoted unanimity and Christian sociality.⁵⁴⁶ It was through religion that art was unified with life.⁵⁴⁷

Both Gippius and Merezhkovskii saw the struggle against Russian chauvinism as the most urgent task during the war. This expression of an absolute nationalism was in Merezhkovskii's mind as great a danger as German military aggression, even if he considered it to be restricted only to the intelligentsia. The common people, on the contrary, supposedly shared Merezhkovskii's view of patriotism as being too holy to talk about. The soldiers realized that the war was a struggle for “truth”, and they therefore faced death without hesitation, condemnation or accusations.⁵⁴⁸ However, while the common Russian people felt awe in face of the historical moment, and the soldiers showed respect

540 Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 314 (“O chernykh kolodtsakh”).

541 It was logical of Merezhkovskii to leave out Viacheslav Ivanov with his vision of “freedom in unity” (*sobornost'*). On the other hand, it appears that Sologub was excluded by chance from the list of promoters of individualism.

542 D.S. Merezhkovskii, *Dve tainy russkoi poezii: Nekrasov i Tiutchev* (Petrograd, 1915), p. 13.

543 Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 314 (“O chernykh kolodtsakh”).

544 *Ibid.*, p. 333 (“Noch'iu o solntse”).

545 Bedford, pp. 26-7.

546 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 85 (“Eshche o griadushchem khame”).

547 Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 321 (“O chernykh kolodtsakh”).

548 Merezhkovskii, “Voskresnet: Iz dnevnika”, *Russkoe slovo* 10.4.1916 83.

for the written and unwritten laws of war, the “idle warrior-chatterers” among the intelligentsia did not show any restraint in their verbal attacks on the enemy. This went to show how estranged they were from the genuine Russia and how false their love for their native country was. The layer of culture had also turned out to be extremely thin in Russia: “Not the soldiers on the battle fields, but we, the people of culture, were the first to be wounded.”⁵⁴⁹ For many it was more difficult to cope with victories than with setbacks. Words that should have been holy were repeated until they lost their meaning. In their writings about the war, the chauvinists showed such a lack of understanding of the tragic side of events, that Merezhkovskii found it proper to characterize them as “nightingales over blood” (“solov’i nad krov’iu”), an expression he found in a short story (“Grabezh”) by Nikolai Leskov.

Not only did the chauvinists show a conspicuous lack of restraint in their comments about the war, but they were also ready to brand all cautious warnings as treason. The only national weaknesses that they acknowledged were too great modesty and too low self-esteem. Merezhkovskii commented sarcastically, “It is possible to be great and modest, but it is impossible to say ‘I am modest and great.’”⁵⁵⁰ What he advocated at this stage was instead doubt and a self-critical attitude.⁵⁵¹

Merezhkovskii saw Slavophilism as the main Russian “disease”. He did not judge and condemn it only on the basis of its classical representatives, but also paid attention to the writings of Tiutchev and Dostoevskii – ironically enough the two most important spiritual authorities for another symbolist, Ivanov. Merezhkovskii’s attitude to Dostoevskii was divided. On the one hand he rejected his conservative traits; on the other he based his notion of a Christian sociality partly upon the teachings of Father Zosima from *The Brothers Karamazov*. This ambiguous attitude to Dostoevskii – seen as a prophet both of the Antichrist and of Christ⁵⁵² – had already been expressed in the essay “The Prophet of the Russian Revolution” (“Prorok russkoi revoliutsii”) of 1906.

The chauvinistic messages of Dostoevskii and Tiutchev were summed up by Merezhkovskii in polemical form: “Christ blessed Russia, and all other people he cursed.”⁵⁵³ Only the Russians were genuine Christians, and Providence had furthermore chosen them for a historic mission. Out of this arose the dream of

549 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 207 (“Dukha ne ugashaite”).

550 *Ibid.*, p. 201 (“Solov’i nad krov’iu”).

551 Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, “O religioznoi lzhi natsionalizma”, in *Zapiski Petrogradskogo religiozno-filosofskogo obshchestva 1914-1915 g.g.*, vol. VI (Petrograd, 1916), p. 40.

552 E. Lundberg, *Merezhkovskii i ego novoe khristianstvo* (St. Petersburg, 1914), p. 62 n.

553 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 128 (“O religioznoi lzhi natsionalizma”).

Russian as a worldwide empire. In Merezhkovskii's eyes, however, Tiutchev's vision of Russia as a ruthless great power looked more like the kingdom of the Antichrist than the Kingdom of God.⁵⁵⁴ That Merezhkovskii saw a German influence behind this expression of absolute nationalism did not make it more acceptable. Furthermore, much to Merezhkovskii's annoyance, the Slavophiles and their followers supported autocracy, giving it a religious significance, and feared all signs of revolutionary thinking. As the Slavophiles did not recognize the notion of "universalism" in practice, they were irretrievably excluded from the future of mankind.⁵⁵⁵

Merezhkovskii had always wanted to see the intelligentsia as the conscience of Russia. His wish to find allies had often resulted in him detecting "religiousness" even in writers and thinkers that were pronounced atheists.⁵⁵⁶ An important duty of the Russian intelligentsia was to oppose nationalism. As the signs of such an opposition were insignificant at the moment, Merezhkovskii instead stressed the historical tradition, starting with Peter the Great. Allies in the 19th century – Pushkin, Belinskii, Chaadaev, Tolstoi and Solov'ev – were singled out. These were writers who, according to Merezhkovskii, had not only fought nationalism, but also supported the notion of an absolute and undivided humanity.⁵⁵⁷

Merezhkovskii's fierce criticism of Slavophilism, in both its historical and present revised forms, did not mean that he himself belonged to the camp of Westernizers. He loved both Russia and Europe, and he therefore could not support either camp exclusively.⁵⁵⁸ He proposed a new formulation of the question "West or East?": "West *and* East".⁵⁵⁹ Before the war he had offered a synthesis of the two concepts in a review of Belyi's novel *The Silver Dove* (*Serebrianyi golub'*),⁵⁶⁰ and he now repeated his arguments in a comment, "Not Holy Russia" ("Ne sviataia Rus") on the much discussed article by Maksim Gor'kii, "Two Souls" ("Dve dushi", 1915). Gor'kii spoke of the two souls of Russia, the Asiatic, of which religion was the purest expression, and the European, which found expression in an ardent belief in science. Gor'kii's assumption was that in order to have a future, Russia had to make a decisive choice and

554 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

555 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

556 Bedford, pp. 132-3.

557 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 161 ("Chaadaev").

558 Bedford, p. 93; Rosenthal, p. 189.

559 Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 308 ("Vostok ili zapad", 1911).

560 *Ibid.*, pp. 295-309.

reject the lies of religion, or the East, and instead choose the truth of science, or the West.⁵⁶¹

Merezhkovskii found Gor'kii's sharp polarization unacceptable. His ideal was a Christianity which would include both the contemplative depth of the East and the revolutionary energy of the West. There were, on the other hand, features of Gor'kii's thinking that he felt much attracted by. These were his lack of meekness and smugness, a strong awareness of the sinful Russia and a belief that Russia was only beginning to face its choice. The neo-Slavophiles believed that "resurrection" was already at hand, but in reality Russia was still only in the middle of its Easter week. Holy Russia was not a reality, but an inspiring task.⁵⁶² Polish messianism provided a model for how the question of a national calling should be settled without lapses into self-righteousness and imperialistic dreams. The relationship between a national and a universal truth had been solved by Polish thinkers on the basis of religion. In that way messianism did not become an expression of an absolute nationalism, but meant above all "serving, self-denial, suffering, sacrifice".⁵⁶³ This was to be Russia's way, as well.

In one of his aphorisms of August 1914, Merezhkovskii expressed a fear of profaning the moment through inadequate words: "And for every false word, the nation's blood falls on the heads of those who lie."⁵⁶⁴ Just like Gippius, Merezhkovskii came to doubt not only the importance of the writer's work, but also the written word as such at a time of universal tragedy. One aphorism poignantly expressed these misgivings: "Two lines of a war telegram are more significant than all the works of Goethe and Pushkin."⁵⁶⁵ As it was, culture was defeated by militarism, and true art had been replaced by utilitarian modes of thinking.

The theme of war was not in itself alien to Merezhkovskii's aesthetics, but he preferred to turn the issue into an ethical dilemma. Even if everyone was involved in the war, the stakes inevitably varied greatly. While the soldiers endangered their lives, the writers had nothing to fear. An appropriate reaction was therefore silence, not as an expression of indifference or ignorance, but of reverence in the face of human suffering. In the end, Merezhkovskii, just like Gippius, found it difficult to stay true to the ideal of silence, but he

⁵⁶¹ M. Gor'kii, "Dve dushi", *Letopis' dek.* (1915), pp. 123-34.

⁵⁶² Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, pp. 22-3 ("Ne sviataia Rus"). First publ. as "Ne sviataia Rus': Religiiia Gor'kogo" in *Russkoe slovo* 11.9.1916 210.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 131 ("O religioznoi lzhi natsionalizma").

⁵⁶⁴ Merezhkovskii, "Mysli o voine".

⁵⁶⁵ Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 207 ("Dukha ne ugashaite").

did show considerable restraint in his wartime writings. As for the theme of war, Merezhkovskii preferred articles and lectures to fiction. He consistently treated the war from an elevated, historical perspective, which excluded not only subjective emotions, but ultimately also the realities of the war. His aim was to explain the significance of the events and not to inspire its participants. Whereas Sologub wanted to promote a will to victory, Merezhkovskii's role was more that of a national conscience.

Of all the symbolists, Merezhkovskii suffered the most from censorship.⁵⁶⁶ Considering the nature of his writings, this was in itself not surprising. In *Birzhevye vedomosti* Merezhkovskii complained about his situation, demanding freedom of expression during war, too. While the nationalists were allowed to speak out loud, Merezhkovskii claimed that he could not even whisper about "the religious lie of nationalism".⁵⁶⁷ For him censorship was not only a private problem for the writer, but a question with national implications. If the spirit was indeed stronger than the sword and therefore of utter importance during a war, it was a sign of short-sightedness to restrict the free word, the weapon of the spirit, at a time when it was needed more than ever.

In an August 1914 aphorism, Merezhkovskii had branded both a pro-war stance and pacifism as foolishness. The slogan "Down with the war" had been taken up by some of Tolstoi's followers, with whom Merezhkovskii and Gippius had casual contacts at the beginning of the war. Merezhkovskii was visibly provoked by Tolstoi's pacifism, as he acknowledged the truth of the claim that war was irreconcilable with Christianity. However, just like Gippius, Merezhkovskii eventually did not attach much significance to moral solutions for the individual, as he saw the collective as being the decisive historical force at its present stage. He similarly regarded the World War as a war without leaders, heroes and individuals.⁵⁶⁸ In spite of their genuine Christian spirit, the pacifists' refusal to take part in the war was therefore at heart an isolated and antisocial action. As everyone was responsible for the war, it could furthermore be a greater sin to stay out of the war than to participate in it side by

566 Examples of severe censorship can be seen in the articles "Voina i religiia" (*V tylu*, pp. 87-9) and "O religioznoi lzhi natsionalizma" (*Golos zhizni* 4 /1914/, pp. 22-4). As can be seen in the book *Bylo i budet* (1915), consisting entirely of essays which had been written before the war, it was not only remarks connected with the war that met the disapproval of the censors.

567 Merezhkovskii, "Natsionalizm pred sudom religii".

568 Merezhkovskii, "Mysli o voine"; Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 177 ("Voina i religiia").

side with others. Renewal could not occur through passivity, and participation in the war was a way of showing repentance and freeing oneself from guilt.⁵⁶⁹ Merezhkovskii criticized Tolstoi for not having taken the true forces behind war into consideration. Instead of showing how nationalism could be defeated, Tolstoi had only condemned it, and his pacifism had remained therefore ineffective and unrealistic. The goal of Tolstoyanism was furthermore a godless, external union of humanity and not the spiritual universalism that Merezhkovskii craved for.⁵⁷⁰

The position of the individual soldier could also illustrate the necessity for a simultaneous rejection and acceptance. To the question, "Is it possible to love the enemy and still kill?", Merezhkovskii offered the answer: "It is possible. And even if it were impossible, then one still has to do it."⁵⁷¹ This inescapable conflict and paradox was perceived by him as basic for religion. Twice Merezhkovskii returned to an episode at the battle front, which for him served as the perfect illustration of how a true Christian soldier should act. A Russian soldier had wounded an Austrian enemy with his bayonet and had then carried him for miles on his back in search of help. When the Austrian died, the Russian lost his mind out of pity and horror.⁵⁷² Merezhkovskii did not note that from a military point of view this was not an effective way of waging war.

The war put Merezhkovskii in a difficult situation. Even if he advocated a universal, Christian brotherhood, it was apparent that he supported Russia and its allies. He criticized Russian nationalism even more sharply than the corresponding German phenomenon and stressed the guilt of everyone involved, but still accepted only one outcome of the war, namely peace through a victory of the Allied Powers. Without victory there can be no peace, he concluded in March 1915.⁵⁷³ Even if the nations were to a high degree each other's doubles, there were still decisive differences in their ultimate goals. While Germany was striving for universal supremacy, the Allied Powers were fighting for peace and liberation.⁵⁷⁴ Yielding to the common tendency to create national myths, Merezhkovskii stressed that love of peace was an exceptional Russian

569 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 176 ("Voina i religiiia").

570 *Ibid.*, p. 60 ("Raspiatyti narod").

571 *Ibid.*, p. 187 ("Dva Islama").

572 *Ibid.*, pp. 175 ("Voina i religiiia"), 187 ("Dva Islama").

573 Merezhkovskii, "Zelenaia vesna".

574 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 138 ("Evreiskii vopros kak russkii"). First publ. in *Russkie vedomosti* 25.3.1915 68. Also publ. in *Shchit*, pp. 136-8.

national trait, while Germany, and the rest of Western Europe also found inspiration in war: “‘World is peace’ is a Russian, a Slavonic attitude, while ‘world is war’ is the German, the European attitude.”⁵⁷⁵

The alleged Russian love of peace did not represent an obstacle in the war, but on the contrary inspired the army. Driven by their hatred of war, the Russian soldiers fought stubbornly, so as to put an end to the war quickly. In the end, it was psychological factors that would decide the outcome of the struggle, “What you love, you will get, without stopping in front of anything.”⁵⁷⁶ Similarly to Sologub, Merezhkovskii ended up stressing the decisive importance of faith and will, without paying much attention to the actual situation at the front.

Not since the days of the barbarian invasions had European culture faced such a serious danger as in the present war. If the threats had previously been external, they now arose from man’s inner self. A German defeat was not sufficient, according to Merezhkovskii. The future of humankind depended upon whether absolute nationalism could be defeated on a wider scale. When Russia chose between nationalism and a higher, universal truth, it was a choice that affected not only its own fate, but the future of the whole of Europe. If Russia rejected individualism, nationalism and the bestiality which these evils fostered, hopes of great changes emerged.⁵⁷⁷

The war revealed that everyone had been professing a corrupt religion, and that the war could thus be defeated only on the religious plane. As one nation could not defeat another, only an abstract truth, such as “humanity”, could do so. What was needed was a Christianity which would not be a private affair, but a common, social concern, and which would actively transform society. The events of the war revealed in themselves the “insignificance of *one* and the greatness of *all*”⁵⁷⁸ and they could therefore lead to the destruction of individualism and the birth of a new kind of sociality. After the war, the basis of world peace was to rest on religion, as a peace without Christ was impossible.⁵⁷⁹

Merezhkovskii came to attach great symbolic significance to the Easter of 1915. The war was the Holy Week that humanity had to pass through.

575 Merezhkovskii, “Est’ Rossiia”. In Russian the word “mir” means both “world” and “peace”. Before the orthographic reforms of 1918 the distinction between these two senses was indicated through the use of two different signs for “i”.

576 Merezhkovskii, “Zelenaia vesna”, *Russkoe slovo* 22.3.1915 67.

577 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 178 (“Voina i religiia”).

578 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

579 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

A victory for the Allied Powers meant that peace and the “Bright Ressurrection” were growing closer. The war thereby acquired a meaning, in spite of Merezhkovskii’s assertion that it should not and could not be justified. Even if the war was a failure and a manifestation of how strong the notion of nation and how weak the notion of humanity had been, it did not need to be the swan-song of humankind. It could, on the contrary, accelerate the transfiguration of the world. Gippius had formulated a simile that Merezhkovskii accepted. The war was a fire that men had to pass through. It was the result of and the punishment for lapses from Christ, but “In the fire there is purification, beyond the fire there is salvation.”⁵⁸⁰ At the outbreak of the war, Merezhkovskii had prophesied a new heaven and a new earth: “Everything has melted, everything is flowing; if it hardens, it will be in new forms.”⁵⁸¹ It was within Merezhkovskii’s “mystical apocalypticism” that the war received a religious meaning.

The Outsiders

Aleksandr Blok: “Back to You, Russia!”

The notes in Aleksandr Blok’s notebook from the summer of 1914 are brief and do not display any premonitions, or any emotions at all for that matter. But Blok’s concrete actions at the outbreak of the World War reveal that, whatever his feelings concerning the war, he found it natural to seek a place in the national defence. He was not likely to be called up for military service because of his family situation and his age, and neither did he thirst for personal experience of warfare. To “serve” as a poet was also ruled out. Unlike Briusov, Blok had no theoretical objections to political poems, but in practice he had already proven that he was incapable of producing occasional poetry. His sense of professionalism alone raised obstacles. Blok’s feelings for Russia were, moreover, too ambivalent to be moulded into the chauvinistic motherland image that came into vogue at the onset of the war.

“Nothing but manual labor is needed”, Blok wrote in his notebook on 7 August 1914.⁵⁸² As soon as he returned from his estate to the capital, he joined an aid committee for soldiers’ families. His task was to look up families in need

⁵⁸⁰ Merezhkovskii, “O religioznoi lzhi natsionalizma”, in *Zapiski Petrogradskogo religiozno-filosofskogo obshchestva*, p. 43.

⁵⁸¹ Merezhkovskii, “Mysli o voine”.

⁵⁸² Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 236.

and raise money through appeals in the press. Blok's contact with life at the front was obtained through relatives and friends. In September, his wife, the actress Liubov' Blok, left to serve as a nurse in L'vov. General Frants Kublitskii-Piottukh, Blok's stepfather, was also in Galicia, and he was to spend the whole war at the front, first commanding a brigade, later a division. In November, the poet Vladimir Piast, a close friend of Blok, left Petrograd to serve in the army.⁵⁸³

It was a leave-taking at a railway station that Blok depicted in the poem "Off to War" ("Na voinu"), later published without a title. On 30 August, Blok had visited his mother in Peterhof, where he came to witness how military trains left for the front. The poem, which was published three weeks later, was born out of his impressions of this scene:

The Petrograd sky grew dim with rain;
 an echelon left for the war.
 Endlessly – platoon after platoon, bayonet after bayonet,
 filled up wagon after wagon.

In this train with a thousand lives there bloomed
 the pain of parting, the anxiety of love,
 of strength, of youth, of hope... In the distant sunset
 were smokelike clouds dipped in blood.

And, taking their seats, some sang "The Varangian",
 while others, out of tune, sang "Yermak",
 and they shouted "Hurrah!" and they laughed,
 and each quietly crossed himself.

Suddenly, a falling leaf flew up in the wind,
 a swaying lamp started to blink,
 and beneath black clouds a cheerful bugler
 started playing the signal for departure.

The horn struck up a cry of martial glory,
 filling hearts with anxiety.
 The rumble of wheels and the hoarse whistle
 were drowned by an endless "Hurrah!"

⁵⁸³ Aleksandr Blok *v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, vol. 1, p. 393 (V. Piast).

The last buffers had disappeared in the gloom,
 and silence had descended till morning,
 but "Hurrah!" still carried to us over rainy fields,
 that terrible cry sounding like, "It's time!"

No, we did not feel sadness, we did not feel pity,
 in spite of the rainy distance.
 This is bright, hard, reliable steel:
 does it need our sorrow as well?

This pity: it will be stifled by fire,
 the thunder of arms and the tread of horses.
 Sadness: it will be covered by a poisoned steam
 that comes from the bloody, Galician fields.*⁵⁸⁴

In the poem there is a detailed realism, starting with the definition of the place, but the core of the poem is its dialogue. One of the voices – we – belongs to the onlookers, those who remain at the station, while the other, a voice not uttered but interpreted, belongs to the departing soldiers. The civilians and the army are contrasted, but there is also the hint of a clash between the intelligentsia and the people, one of Blok's central themes. The onlooker displays a traditional humanism, asserting the primacy of man over abstract principles. The sight of the crowd of soldiers and the thought of the many human lives that will be lost in the war rouse his compassion. In an expressionistic vein, nature underscores the feeling of depression. The songs sung by the soldiers tell about Russian heroism not in connection with victories but at

* "Petrogradskoe nebo mutilos' dozhdem,/ Na voinu ukhodil eshelon./ Bez kontsa – vzvod za vzvodom i shtyk za shtykom/ Napolnial za vagonom vagon.// V etom poezde tysich'iu zhiznei tseli/ Bol' razluki, trevogi ljubvi,/ Sila, iunost', nadezhda... V zakatnoi dali/ Byli dymnye tuchi v krovi.// I, sadias', zapevali *Variaga* odni,/ A drugie – ne v lad – *Er-maka*,/ I krichali *ura*, i shutili oni,/ I tikhon'ko krestilas' ruka.// Vdrug pod vetrom vzletel opadaiushchii list,/ Raskachnuvshis', fonar' zamigal,/ I pod chernoiu tuchei veselyi gornist/ Zaigral k otpravlen'iu signal.// I voennoiu slavoi zaplakal rozhok,/ Napolniaia trevo-goi serdtsa./ Gromykan'e koles i okhriphsii svistok/ Zaglushilo *ura* bez kontsa.// Uzh poslednie skrylis' vo mgle bufera,/ I soshla tishina do utra,/ A s dozhdlivykh polei vsë neslos' k nam *ura*,/ V groznom klike zvuchalo: *pora!*// Net, nam ne bylo grustno, nam ne bylo zhal'/ Nesmotria na dozhdlivuiu dal'/ Eto – iasnaia, tverdaia, vernaia stal'/ I nuzhna li ei nasha pechal'?// Eta zhalost' – ee zaglushaet pozhar,/ Grom orudii i topot konei./ Grust' – ee zastilaet otravlennyi par/ S galitsiiskikh krovavykh polei..."

⁵⁸⁴ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, pp. 275-6 ("Petrogradskoe nebo mutilos' dozhdem...").

times of defeat, but still the truth of the masses, which is compared to “bright, hard, reliable steel”, is stronger and subdues all sorrow and hesitation.

The war is here not depicted as a “great national woe and trial of the people”, as has been claimed,⁵⁸⁵ but rather as a “great woe and trial of the intelligentsia”. If an awareness of the senselessness of the war can be detected here, as Leonid Dolgoplov asserts,⁵⁸⁶ then this attitude is presented as a private, inappropriate reaction that must be suppressed, so that one can better perceive what Blok used to call the “music of time”. The poem “The Petrograd sky grew dim with rain...” thus does not fit into the category either of patriotic, or of anti-war poetry, but rather offers an example of the right attitude, the “prophetic alarm”,⁵⁸⁷ with which the big upheavals of history were to be faced.

In “The Petrograd sky grew dim with rain...” there is a humility in the face of the “spontaneous will” behind the war, which for Blok embodied the wisdom of history. Blok was never to show any interest in the origin or concrete goals of the war, nor did he ever make an attempt to characterize the warring sides. He did not regard events from a personal point of view, fixed once and for all, but rather tried to register prevailing moods and through them anticipate the future. The writer Vil’gel’m Zorgenfrei speaks of Blok’s “impersonal attitude” to the World War,⁵⁸⁸ while Gippius, who watched Blok’s development with apprehension, saw it as a “tragedy of irresponsibility”.⁵⁸⁹ But it can also be said that Blok remained faithful to the symbolist outlook, when he trusted his intuition and surrendered to the elemental forces in a wish to penetrate what he called the general and higher mysticism of the war.⁵⁹⁰

Starting with Blok’s contemporary, the writer Sergei Gorodetskii, the fact that the “hurrah” (“ura”) of the soldiers sounds like “it’s time” (“pora”) has been interpreted as a sign that Blok saw beyond the present events and confidently anticipated what would follow after the war, implicitly the October revolution of 1917.⁵⁹¹ But Blok’s “it’s time” is more of a parallel to Briusov’s poem “It is time!” (“Pora!”). The war is seen as an inevitable and even longed-for release

585 Vl. Orlov, *Aleksandr Blok: Ocherk tvorchestva* (Moscow, 1956), p. 206.

586 Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman “Peterburg”*, p. 359.

587 K. Mochul’skii, *Aleksandr Blok* (Parizh, 1948), p. 377.

588 *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniiaakh sovremennikov*, vol. II, p. 22 (V.A. Zorgenfrei, “Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok”).

589 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 26.

590 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 16 (“Avtobiografiia”).

591 *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniiaakh sovremennikov*, vol. I, p. 340 (Sergei Gorodetskii, “Vospominaniia ob Aleksandre Bloke”); Orlov, *Aleksandr Blok*, p. 207; Boris Solov’ev, *Poet i ego podvig: Tvorcheskii put’ Aleksandra Bloka* (Moscow, 1980), p. 568.

of suppressed fores. Moreover, the manuscript of the poem, which carries the programmatic title “War” (“Voina”), shows that during the creative process Blok played down an initially strong nationalistic and martial spirit. As an argument for the invincibility of Russia, the expanse and the inexhaustible reserves of the country were pointed out, but also the toughness that its people had developed through a hard life. What had been seen as a curse in earlier poems was here presented as a source of strength.

The most interesting and revealing aspect of the manuscript of “The Petrograd sky grew dim with rain...” is, however, the thought that Russia was actually fighting the wrong war. Faithful to the concept of Vladimir Solov’ev, Blok, in an unpublished stanza, evokes the East as the real danger. The East is not only a symbolic notion, but also a concrete metonymy for Asia. Blok had already speculated three years earlier, in a letter to Belyi, about the possibility of a war with China.⁵⁹² Even more concrete than Belyi’s apprehensions about “the Yellow peril” is Blok’s vision in 1914 of how the “sunrise” is casting a covetous eye on the vast expanses of Russia under a menacing silence.⁵⁹³ The fact that Japan had in fact entered the war on the side of the Allied Powers does not seem to have shattered Blok’s beliefs, but it is possible that it prevented him from expressing his apprehensions publicly. It is noteworthy that in his last poetic comment on the war, “The Scythians” (“Skify”, 1918), Blok also returned to the question of the alleged threat from the East, not only as a symbol for anti-spiritual forces, but also in a concrete fashion, this time as an argument for the necessity of immediate peace between the warring nations of Europe. Fixed as his attention was on the Europe-Asia theme, the actual events of the war caused a visible confusion in Blok and, in fact, seriously dented his stature as an oracular poet.

Blok himself defined “The Petrograd sky grew dim with rain...” as a “war poem”.⁵⁹⁴ Except for “Antwerp” (1914),⁵⁹⁵ there are no more poems by Blok that could be unambiguously assigned to this category. Nor did Blok comment on the war in articles or interviews. His attitude to events must therefore be pieced together from casual and brief remarks in his note-book, the diary which he started in May 1917, letters and conversations. During the first

592 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VIII, p. 334.

593 *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 598.

594 *Pis'ma Aleksandra Bloka k rodnym*, vol. II (Moscow-Leningrad, 1932), p. 260 (letter to his mother, 23 Sept. 1914).

595 See pp. 65-6.

months Blok was completely absorbed by the war.⁵⁹⁶ He registered Russian military victories with satisfaction, while the news of defeats pained him. As early as September the successful offensive in Galicia made him optimistically declare that the war would soon be over, ending in a victory for Russia.⁵⁹⁷ At this stage Blok also perceived the war as a “feast”,⁵⁹⁸ and he shocked Gippius by claiming that the war was above all “fun”.⁵⁹⁹ His greatest concern were the rumours of a pro-German block at the Imperial court that was prepared to agree to peace on the enemy’s conditions. He wrote indignantly in his note-book in November 1914: “Base rumours about peace, and this at a moment when we are beating the Germans particularly soundly.”⁶⁰⁰ This initially positive attitude to the war can be seen as the reflection of a semi-military upbringing,⁶⁰¹ but it can also be said that Blok, like millions of other Europeans in 1914, was carried away by the magnitude and the dynamism of the war, especially as he had no objections to warfare on ethical grounds.

On the basis of his trips to Western Europe Blok had developed a critical attitude to modern bourgeois society. The free spirit of the individual appeared to have been replaced in the West by a “mechanical civilization”, an “automation of existence”.⁶⁰² Together with his readiness to view Russia as a young, dynamic force, suitable for future historic missions, this attitude could easily have made him join forces with the patriots. Blok, nevertheless, never came to interpret the war as a struggle between two opposing principles. One reason was that he had no pronounced antipathy towards Germany, nor any particular fondness for any of the main Allied Powers.⁶⁰³ For Blok the war chiefly meant the promise of a break-up and of great, but still undefined changes after a period of spiritual stagnation. Viktor Shklovskii, the future literary theoretician, who saw Blok in the autumn of 1914, comments: “He did not rejoice at the war, but accepted it as a step in history, without knowing what would follow.”⁶⁰⁴ Originally Blok nurtured hopes concerning the renewing effect of

596 *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, vol. I, p. 127 (Sergei Solov’ev, “Vospominaniia ob Aleksandre Bloke”).

597 *Pis’ma Aleksandra Bloka k rodnym*, vol. II, p. 259 (letter to his mother, 31 Aug. 1914).

598 *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: Aleksandr Blok. Novye materialy i issledovaniia*, vol. 92, part II (Moscow, 1981), p. 218 (quoted in Piast’s letter to Blok, 25 Mar. 1915).

599 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 320; vol. II, p. 26.

600 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 247.

601 Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. II, p. 216.

602 V. Piskunov, *Tema o Rossii: Rossiia i revoliutsiia v literature nachala XX veka* (Moscow, 1983), pp. 143–4.

603 *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, vol. I, p. 392 (V. Piast).

604 Viktor Shklovskii, *O Maiakovskom* (Moscow, 1940), p. 75.

the war. Afterwards he admitted that “for a minute it seemed as if it would cleanse the air; so it seemed to us, extremely impressionable people.”⁶⁰⁵ In a manner reminiscent of Sologub’s central concept, the war appeared to have a positive, inspiring effect, not only on Russian society as a whole, but also on the individual. To an acquaintance, who complained in the autumn of 1914 about the hardships of the war, Blok said:

(...) all the same there is also something positive in this, something that elevates people. Something new has appeared in the faces and movements of the simple, coarse people. You just have to look at any soldier and his wife, standing on the tram platform, how tenderly they hold hands, how serious and bright their faces are, and you feel that confronted with parting, with approaching danger, they have left behind them all their quarrels and squabbles, everything petty and trivial, and that they now value every minute they can spend together.⁶⁰⁶

Blok soon abandoned his voluntary work on the aid committee and returned to literature. His wife came back from L’vov to take up acting again. All this did not mean that Blok completely forgot the war. He was highly active in charitable matters, contributing to almost every anthology and public reading dedicated to the support of the war. Blok hardly ever turned down invitations, and just as he would be guilty in the summer of 1917 of mixing up Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, as a result of his detachment from political life, he now showed little awareness of the prevailing splits in the world of literature. Blok participated both in *Otechestvo*, together with Sologub and Andreev, and in Merezhkovskii’s and Gippius’ organ *Golos zhizni*. He would also have joined the *Novoe vremia* sponsored, ultra-patriotic journal *Lukomor’e*, if Gippius had not intervened in time.⁶⁰⁷

The poems that Blok read at meetings or published in charity anthologies and in the press still differed from the contributions of other writers, in that the theme of war was excluded. Afterwards Andrei Belyi praised Blok for having been one of the few who refrained from writing “nationalistic poems”.⁶⁰⁸ In 1915 the critic M. Nevedomskii hailed this as a wise decision, set against the

605 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VI, p. 10 (“Intelligentsiia i revoliutsiia”).

606 *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, vol. I, p. 481 (V.P. Verigina, “Vospominaniia ob Aleksandre Bloke”).

607 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 27.

608 *Pamiati Aleksandra Bloka: Andrei Belyi, Ivanov-Razumnik, A.Z. Shteinberg* (Petrograd, 1922), p. 27.

many artistic failures of the authors of “war literature”.⁶⁰⁹ But Blok’s choice was scarcely deliberate as his poetry was born at a subconscious level which could not be manipulated by the demands of the moment. While he was rejoicing at Russian victories in the war, most of the poems he was writing at the time were filled with a gloomy spirit. He lamented his own generation as a “lost generation”, filled with a “fateful emptiness” (“Rozhdennye v goda glukhie...”), and at a moment when the general tendency was to idealize the Russian character, Blok gave a ruthless portrait of a greedy Russian merchant, uncultivated and hypocritical, in “To wallow shamelessly in sin...” (“Greshit’ besstyдно, neprobadno...”). In the last stanza of the poem a love for even this side of Russia is unexpectedly voiced. Perhaps there was no irony in this, and Blok indeed wanted to express with a “patriotic poem”⁶¹⁰ the attitude “my country right or wrong”,⁶¹¹ or even the attitude of an all-compassionate Christian love,⁶¹² but still the ambiguity of the poem was obvious. When “To wallow shamelessly in sin...” was included in a report to Nicholas II in 1916, it was characterized as a slander on Russia.⁶¹³

Blok added to the confusion by publishing, without indicating the year of composition, several poems that had been written long before the war.⁶¹⁴ In the new context old poems like “The Sign” (“Znak”, 1900), “An unprecedented time is coming...” (“Nastupaet pora nebyvalaia...”, 1901), “Pale Blue” (“Goluboe”, 1902), “To My Sister” (“Moei sestre”, 1910-14) and “It happened in the dark Carpathians...” (“Bylo to v temnykh Karpatakh...”, 1913) displayed a surprising topicality. The present is characterized as darkness, blood, sacrifices, and even concretely as war, while vague, mysterious signs testify to a coming “new age”. Read in 1914-1915, these poems gave the impression that Blok had begun to attach apocalyptic expectations to the war, but as usual Blok was not very precise or even consistent in his premonitions. When Sergei Makovskii, chief editor of the prestigious journal *Apollon*, asked for a contribution in early 1915, Blok sent him the poem “A Voice from the Chorus” (“Golos iz khora”), which included a

609 Nevedomskii, “Chto stalos’ s nashei literaturoi?”, p. 277.

610 K. Chukovskii, *Kniga ob Aleksandre Bloke* (Berlin, 1922), p. 116.

611 Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. II, p. 213.

612 Mochul’skii, *Aleksandr Blok*, p. 378.

613 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, pp. 296, 503 n. 65.

614 In light of this fact, it was inconsistent of Blok to be displeased with the publishing house *Otechestvo* when it emphasized the nationalistic tone of his volume of poetry, *Stikhi o Rossii* (Petrograd, 1915), by, for example, publishing “Na pole Kulikovom” without a date, making it look like a fresh response to Russia’s battle with Germany. (Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. II, p. 219.)

prophecy of a coming terrible era of destruction.⁶¹⁵ Makovskii refused to print the poem, as its pessimism ran counter to the confidence in the Russian army that *Apollon* wanted to convey. Blok defended himself by saying that “A Voice from the Chorus” had been written before the war, and that the time evoked in the poem was a distant future. As for the war, he asserted that he looked forward to its outcome with as much confidence as anybody: “I believe in the greatness of Russia, I love her and expect a victory.”⁶¹⁶

In the end, it remained unclear whether at this point Blok really saw the war as the anticipated turning point in history. It tempted him for a moment with its inherent possibilities, but it ultimately failed to alter the established dark keynote of his poetry, the image of a “terrible world”. According to Gippius it was a deeply felt spiritual bond with Russia that paradoxically prevented Blok from falling victim to nationalism.⁶¹⁷ In the poem “The White Banner” (“Beloe znamia”), written in September 1914, he confirmed his affinity with and loyalty and love for Russia, but he was well aware not only of Russia’s strength, but also of its weakness. Very early on Blok was weighed down by the apprehension that the burden of the World War could turn out to be too heavy for Russia. To his wife he wrote, “I feel the war and I feel that it is all resting on the shoulders of Russia, and most of all I feel sorry for Russia (...).”⁶¹⁸

The whole spectrum of Blok’s attitudes to Russia was represented in *Poems About Russia* (*Stikhi o Rossii*), a collection of poetry which appeared in the spring of 1915. Most of the poems had been published previously, but they had never been collected thematically in book form. They confirmed that Blok’s love for Russia was divided, as he saw both the primitive and frightening “Finnish Russia” (“finskaia Rus”) and the future, industrial Russia, the “new America” (“Novaia Amerika”). Blok feared that the poems, with their unorthodox treatment of the patriotic theme, were untimely and therefore would not have an audience.⁶¹⁹ In reality the slim volume won recognition from all camps. Of special importance for Blok was Gippius’ praise.⁶²⁰ None of the cheap, one-dimensional patriotism that dominated contemporary “war literature”, was to be found here. Taken together Blok’s poems appeared to offer a

615 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 62 (“Golos iz khora”).

616 *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniiaakh sovremennikov*, vol. II, p. 433 n. 14 (letter to S. Makovskii, 12 Jan. 1915).

617 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 26.

618 *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: Aleksandr Blok. Pis'ma k zhene*, vol. 89 (Moscow, 1978), p. 332.

619 D.E. Maksimov (ed.), “Pis'ma i darstvennye nadpisi Bloka Aleksandre Chebotarevskoi”, in *Blokovskii sbornik 1* (Tartu, 1964), p. 550 (ded. to Aleksandra Chebotarevskaia, 1915).

620 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 279.

“new truth” about Russia⁶²¹ and form a “new stage in the lyrical appreciation of Russia”.⁶²² Through its original artistic form, calm tone, lack of idealization and genuinely felt love of Russia, *Poems About Russia* was felt to set a new standard for “war poetry”, even though the book included no other poem explicitly connected with the war apart from “The Petrograd sky grew dim with rain...”. The critic A. Ozhigov held up Blok’s poems as a model for another symbolist, Fedor Sologub: “And in comparison with them, how pitiful, insignificant and poverty-stricken appear the barrack-like works from the muse of Sologub and other poets of the Russian soil, who disgrace it with their indecent empty-sounding primitive patriotism.”⁶²³ It was a paradox that Blok, who as a poet derived no genuine inspiration from the war, was hailed as the true interpreter of the historical moment and raised to the position of a national poet.

Andrei Belyi: “I Am the War”

“My answer to the war was a profound ‘NO’”, Andrei Belyi wrote at the end of the 1920’s.⁶²⁴ In an autobiographical sketch for a book presenting leading Soviet-Russian writers he gave some additional information: “Here, in Dornach, I was caught by the war, and I adopted a strongly negative attitude towards ‘the slaughter of the peoples’, conditioned by my growing sympathy for the extreme left-wing groups of the Russian community of that time.”⁶²⁵

From the point of view of Russia’s new rulers, Belyi’s answer was satisfactory. For example, instead of the neutral term “World War” he uses the strongly emotional expression “slaughter”. It is true that Belyi had already called the World War slaughter in 1918,⁶²⁶ but from having originally been provocative, the expression had been turned into the standard Soviet-Russian language of historical writing by the 1920’s. Belyi displays a totally hostile attitude to the war, but he is careful to point out that he did not denounce it for pacifist reasons, alien to a Marxist, but on the basis of political analysis. Not many Russian writers could, when looking back at the war years, write lines like these with a clear conscience. Belyi did not hesitate to do so, though there were hardly any

621 Iurii Nikol’skii, “Aleksandr Blok o Rossii”, *Russkaia mysl’* 11 (1915), part III, p. 16.

622 Georgii Ivanov, “Stikhi o Rossii” – Aleksandr Blok”, *Apollon* 8-9 (1915), p. 97.

623 Al. Ozhigov, “[review of Blok’s *Stikhi o Rossii*]", *Sovremennyi mir* 9 (1915), part II, p. 189.

624 Andrei Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom i pochemu ia ne perestal im byt’ vo vsekh fazakh moego ideinogo i khudozhestvennogo razvitiia* (Ann Arbor, 1982), p. 102.

625 *Literaturnaia Rossiia: Sbornik sovremennoi russkoi prozy* (Moscow, 1924), p. 10.

626 Belyi, *Sirin uchenogo varvarstva*, p. 23. See also Andrei Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia* (Berlin-Petersburg-Moscow, 1923), p. 418 (“Sovremennikam”).

deeds or published works that could prove that he was not just trying to gloss over the reality retrospectively.

In neutral Switzerland, where Belyi had remained until 1916, there were, to be sure, good conditions for remaining free of nationalist sentiment. Information from both warring sides was available, and even the opposition to the war could make its voice heard. It was here, “au-dessus de la mêlée”, that Romain Rolland wrote his antimilitaristic articles, pleading with European writers to stay aloof from jingoism. It was also in Switzerland that the European anti-war socialists met at conferences in Zimmerwald (September 1915) and Kienthal (April 1916), condemning the war as imperialist and urging the workers of the countries involved to strive for peace without annexations. One of the participants, Vladimir Lenin, went even further with his call to transform an “imperialistic war” into a war between classes. On the other hand, there are also examples of thinkers and writers who chose to back the official Russian war policy even from Swiss territory. For the socialist Georgii Plekhanov the war against “Prussian militarism” was a just cause,⁶²⁷ and the writer Georgii Chulkov, who by the time of the 1905 revolution had caused a schism among the Russian symbolists with his “mystic anarchism”, joined the neo-Slavophile camp at the beginning of the war.⁶²⁸

The strongest evidence of Belyi’s alienation from a war-gripped world is a letter from November 1914 to his mother in Moscow. While the newspapers were filled with “hatred and slander” and accusations of brutality on the other side of the front line, Belyi saw to that which unites people. For him, the main thing was the cultural contribution of all nations. Germany was not a country of barbarians (“barbarians are everywhere”) but “the land of Beethoven, Kant, Goethe, Schiller, Wagner, Schumann, Schubert, science, philosophy...”. Therefore, “the more blood that is shed, the stronger the horrors of war are, the more I want to pray for ‘peace for the whole world’, the more I want to thank all the nations involved in the war for all the beautiful things that they have given mankind”.⁶²⁹

Just like the anti-war socialists that met in Switzerland, the anthroposophical community in Dornach formed an international brotherhood at a time of armed conflict and inflamed nationalism. They were united not only by

627 Samuel H. Baron, “Plekhanov, Georgii Valentinovich”, in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vol. 28 (Gulf Breeze, Florida, 1982), p. 129.

628 See G. Chulkov, “Golos iz-za granitsy: Pis'mo”, *Otechestvo* 1 (1915), p. 23; preface to *Satana* (Moscow, 1915); *Vchera i segodnia: Ocherki* (Moscow, 1916).

629 Andrei Belyi, “*Liubliu Tebia nezumno...*”: *Pis'ma Andreia Belogo k materi (1899-1922)*, ed. by S.D. Voronin (Moscow, 2013), p. 204.

the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, the core of which for Belyi was “the cause of love and peace”,⁶³⁰ but also by their collective work. Representatives of almost twenty nations took part in the construction of the Johannesburg, or Goetheanum, as the building was later called.⁶³¹

In the summer of 1914 Belyi perceived the Dornach colony as the top of Mount Ararat. The anthroposophists were gripped by a feeling of being the sole survivors in a world drowned by the Flood.⁶³² The metaphor also contained the notion of being chosen for a future mission as a result of a righteous way of life. The idea of needing to seek refuge from a coming catastrophe in a spiritual Ark was not new to Belyi, as the same figure of speech had already appeared in a letter to Blok in 1912⁶³³ and also in the novel *Petersburg*.⁶³⁴ At that time Belyi's fears were connected with St. Petersburg and Russia,⁶³⁵ but now the scale was expanded to comprise the whole of Europe. It is interesting to note that the Ark also figures in a poem by Maksimilian Voloshin, “Under the Sign of Leo” (“Pod znakom l'va”), dated Dornach, August 1914. Voloshin saw a hidden meaning in the fact that he had arrived in Dornach on the last train from Germany, just before the border was closed. He had slipped into the “Ark” as the very last “animal” before the Flood,⁶³⁶ and in his case it meant not only a physical, but also a psychological escape from the war. Little is known about the personal relationship between Voloshin and Belyi, but Belyi later characterized Voloshin on the basis of their shared months in Dornach in 1914 as “a person completely foreign to the militaristic madness that had gripped the old world”.⁶³⁷

The Steiner colony formed a safe place of refuge, just as anthroposophy offered an elevated platform from which the turmoil could be watched without nationalistic bias. But life inside the Ark also had its problems. Voloshin called the colony “an excellent and difficult school of a human and non-political atti-

630 Andrei Belyi, “Geteaunum”, *The Andrei Bely Society Newsletter* 3 (1984), p. 27.

631 Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere*, p. 37.

632 Andrei Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. 1 (Moscow-Berlin, 1922), p. 16.

633 Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi, p. 285.

634 Belyi, *Peterburg*, p. 94.

635 Pekka Pesonen, *Vallankumouksen henki hengen vallankumouksessa: Tutkielma Andrei Belyin romaanista “Peterburg” ja sen aatetaustasta*. Slavica Helsingiensias, suppl. 11 (Helsinki, 1987), p. 297.

636 Maksimilian Voloshin, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1982), p. 193 “Pod znakom l'va” / “Tomimym snami, ia dremal...”/.

637 Andrei Belyi, “Dom-muzei M.A. Voloshina”, in *Vospominaniia o Maksimiliane Voloshine* (Moscow, 1990), p. 508.

tude to the war".⁶³⁸ During the first months of the war, the "epoch of 'military passions'", the ties of friendship were severely tried.⁶³⁹ Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans, Poles, Russians tended to divide themselves according to the front lines of the war, and the news about military threats to the famous cathedrals of Paris and Reims caused even Belyi to accuse the Germans of "cultural vandalism".⁶⁴⁰ Steiner fought the imminent disruption with the help of lectures about their common European culture, stressing the unique and equally valuable contribution of all nations.⁶⁴¹

The war was a serious threat to anthroposophy, and, eventually, it would mark the end of the dream that the Goetheanum would form the basis of a new epoch in the spiritual life of humankind.⁶⁴² The failure to find a uniform standpoint against the war was alarming. Many of the anthroposophists resigned themselves to the war, and those who were called up for military service left Switzerland to join the armies of their respective countries. Belyi claims that Steiner did not try to persuade anybody, but his personal example naturally played an important role for his devotees. Even if Steiner felt sympathy for the anti-militarists, as Belyi claims,⁶⁴³ it was obvious that he was not able to forget completely about his own national background. He managed to pass to Belyi the unfounded propaganda statement of the Central Powers that the Serb Gavrilo Princip, the assassin of the Austrian Archduke, was an agent-provocateur, working for France. According to this theory, France had been thirsting for war in order to regain Alsace and therefore ordered the political murder which ultimately unleashed the First World War.⁶⁴⁴

Life in Dornach was outwardly peaceful. Belyi continued to attend Steiner's lectures, study anthroposophy and the scientific works of Goethe and carve wooden sculptures for the Goetheanum, but all these activities took place against the background of the uninterrupted thunder of guns from the clearly

638 Voloshin, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, vol. I, p. CX ("Avtobiografiia Voloshina").

639 Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere*, p. 237.

640 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

641 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

642 Colin Wilson, *Rudolf Steiner: The Man and His Vision. An Introduction to the Life and Ideas of the Founder of Anthroposophy* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, 1985), p. 146.

643 Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, p. 103. As a proof of Steiner's anti-militarism, Belyi (*ibid.*) mentions his positive attitude to "Sukhanov's brochure". He must have in mind Nikolaj Sukhanov's booklet *Nashi levye gruppy i voina* (Petrograd, 1915), which, however, does not promote any conscious opposition to the war, as Belyi claims, but rather a will to defend the status quo (pp. 8-9).

644 Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere*, pp. 239, 271.

visible Vosges mountains on the French side of the border. The Western front ended not far from Basel, and the inhabitants of Dornach had from the outset been panic-stricken at the thought that they might get dragged into the war. But soon everyone got used to the proximity of the fighting, and a new street-lamp in the home village could again cause as much discussion as the news of some recent battle. The inhabitants of the anthroposophical centre also soon learned to distinguish between the sound of French and German guns, but they knew hardly anything about life at the front. The closest Belyi ever came to the war was a German frontier post. Rumour had it that some Russian prisoners of war had been shot dead in an attempted escape a few weeks earlier at the very same place, and for a moment Belyi was shaken by the thought that he might also be shot as an enemy, if he tried to cross the border.⁶⁴⁵

As a writer, Belyi had been outwardly silent since 1912. The outbreak of the war deepened the agony of creation.⁶⁴⁶ The first year of the war yielded just one poem, the only genuine “war poem” that Belyi wrote, befittingly called “War” (“Voina”):

The lull of the stormclouds burst...
A deafening wail of tribes flew up to the heights.
Everything near and dear has been twisted
like a pillar of sand in other, far-away times.

And I, and I?.. The past has no answer,
but where is the past? Gone... Is it really?
There, pouring in from other lands,
inexpressible waves of light call.*⁶⁴⁷

The war is rendered as an intense, overwhelming subjective experience. It had already been there before 1914 as a faint rumble of thunder, but even so it meant a total break with the past. Everything is moving and changing places; everything familiar is blurred. The past cannot offer any explanations, since this war belongs exclusively to the future, but, on the other hand, the signs

645 Andrei Belyi, “U nemetskoi granitsy”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 29.4.1916 15527.

646 Andrei Belyi, [“Voina i tvorchestvo: Otvet na anketu”], *Utro Rossii* 10.12.1916 344.

* “Razorvalos’ zatish’e grozovoe.../ Vzletaet v vys’ gromovyi vopl’ plemen./ Zakrucheno vse blizkoe, rodnoe,/ Kak stolb peskov v dali inekh vremen.// A – ia, a – ia?.. Byloe bez otveta.../ No gde ono?... I net ego... Uzhel’?/ Nevyrazimye, – zovut inekh zemel’/ Tam volny nabegaiushchego sveta.”

647 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 420 (“Voina”).

from the future are still impossible to decipher. The poem shows that Belyi was totally unable to adopt the position of a dispassionate onlooker, as Valerii Briusov did. The expression “wail of the tribes” (“vopl’ plemen”) seems to echo the “call of the enslaved tribes” (“prizyv plemen poraboshchennykh”) from the latter’s “The Last War”, but unlike Briusov, who emphasized the aspirations and tragedies of the nationalities involved, Belyi quickly passed over this aspect of the war, without ever returning to it. Sologub and Bal’mont created syntheses with a clear hierarchy – we and they, good and bad – but Belyi’s perception of the war was splintered into fragments, a split which also shatters the sentence structure. “War” does not even constitute an attempt to define a personal attitude to the war, as the war had already become part of consciousness and no distance could now be established. The poem expressed Belyi’s emotions in October 1914, but two years later he still felt that it most fully revealed his attitude, or rather lack of a fixed attitude, to the events.⁶⁴⁸ Readers did not, however, see the poem until 1918, when it was published in Russia together with other contemporary poems by Belyi.

When the persona of “War” tries in vain to come to terms with the impulses of the war, it is not just a literary experiment, but a reflection of a serious personal drama. Towards the end of 1914 Belyi wrote to his mother: “The war has affected me too strongly; for nearly two months it was just as if I were ill. Only now am I recovering, trying to divert my attention from the haunting thought that blood is flowing.”⁶⁴⁹ This is the first mention of the mental disorder that Belyi allegedly suffered from during the war. Later he would talk only in passing about his “terrible illness”⁶⁵⁰ and the pain and fear that it brought with it.⁶⁵¹ It is certain that Belyi did not overcome his emotional instability in a few months, as he wrote to his mother, but that it actually took him more than a year to get over the disorder.

In reality Belyi’s crisis had not began in 1914 with the war, but a year earlier and then in close connection with anthroposophy.⁶⁵² In 1913 Belyi had an occult experience, which led him to believe that he was to undergo a crucifixion of some sort, in order to attain a higher spiritual level, and that the

648 Quoted in Andrei Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1966), p. 615 comm. 230 (letter to M.K. Morozova, 1916).

649 “Literaturnoe nasledstvo Andreia Belogo: Obzor K. Bugaevoi i A. Petrovskogo”, in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 27-28, p. 620 (letter to mother, 25 Nov. / 8 Dec. 1914).

650 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. II, p. 235 (“Posleslovie”).

651 Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere*, p. 55.

652 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. II, p. 235 (“Posleslovie”).

anthroposophical movement had been assigned a decisive role in the anticipated spiritual revolution and Second Coming of Christ.⁶⁵³ The war came as an additional, external strain to an already deranged mind.

Belyi's *Notes of an Eccentric* (*Zapiski chudaka*, 1922) has been used as the main source of information about his crisis. It is, however, a work whose genre has been difficult to establish.⁶⁵⁴ The book, "the strangest and most neurotic of all his writings",⁶⁵⁵ can be described as an autobiographical novel, but it is a question of dispute where the autobiographical details end and the fictionalized part starts. No help is offered by Belyi himself. He began to work on *Notes of an Eccentric* in 1918 as a retrospective of the war years, but in the foreword, dated January 1922, he denied that the narrator, the writer Leonid Ledianoi, had any points of contact with the "I" of the writer.⁶⁵⁶ Their external biographies coincide in so far as they have written works with identical titles and visited the same places, but Leonid Ledianoi is none the less not Belyi. Four hundred pages and nine months later, however, Belyi seemingly contradicts himself by claiming in the concluding remarks that there is not a single line in *Notes of an Eccentric* that he had not gone through himself in real life.⁶⁵⁷ The illness of the hero was his own illness, and the book is a kind of "case history". The problem with Belyi is that even a statement like this, allegedly uttered in his own name, is part of the fictional structure. The "I" of the foreword and the "I" of the concluding words can thus be seen as nothing more than different masks of the author, just like Leonid Ledianoi, the main character of the novel.

To read *Notes of an Eccentric* as a reliable source on Belyi himself thus has obvious risks. It is noteworthy, for example, that Belyi, while otherwise letting Ledianoi repeat his own, outer life to a high degree, did not have him write articles of the kind he himself did in 1916, namely sober, calm and critical reflections on current questions. By this time Belyi had visibly recovered from his disorder, but in the novel he presents a picture of a prolonged mental instability. But there are also pages in *Notes of an Eccentric* that can be read as a trustworthy picture of wartime life instead of a depiction of persecution mania. Ledianoi complains that German spies were rummaging in his papers in Dornach and that he was suspected of sending light signals to the enemy, as

653 J.D. Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 170-1.

654 *Ibid.*, pp. 164 ff.

655 Samuel D. Cioran, *The Apocalyptic Symbolism of Andrej Belyj* (The Hague-Paris, 1973), p. 181.

656 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. I, p. 9 ("Vместo predisloviia").

657 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. II, p. 235 ("Posleslovie").

he often worked late at night.⁶⁵⁸ During the journey home to Russia in 1916 he has a constant feeling of being shadowed. Belyi's memoirs of Steiner show that these were not necessarily phantasies of a confused mind. An international community was suspect during the war, and there is no reason to doubt Belyi, when in the new context he says that even within the Society there were agents and provocateurs.⁶⁵⁹ Even Steiner himself was suspected of being a German agent, as in August he had been invited for a discussion by General Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the German Staff, whose wife was an anthroposophist.⁶⁶⁰

In 1933 Belyi defined the theme of *Notes of an Eccentric* as "the confusion of a consciousness facing world-wide adventurism".⁶⁶¹ The novel was indeed a consistent depiction of a mind destabilized by the war, a prose equivalent of the poem "War", but a question mark must be inserted after the word "adventurism". Ledianoi is completely unable to see the war as the result of the activities of profit-seeking capitalists and imperialists, something which the formulation hints at. Even if it was part of Belyi's creative method to pick up commonly used concepts and expressions and use them in a subjective way, the statement above is more an indication of how Belyi was trying to digest the rhetoric of communist ideology after 1923, the year of his final return to Russia.

However, there is a close connection between Leonid Ledianoi's emotional life and the global war. Ledianoi believes in earnest that his inner conflicts have materialized in a mystic way and multiplied all around Europe: "Hunger, illness, war, the voices of revolution were the results of my strange actions; all that lived within me and tore me to pieces, flew off around the world (...)." ⁶⁶² This confession has been read as a straightforwardly autobiographical diagnosis. To see one's own inner conflict as the reason and prototype for the catastrophes of Europe was understandably interpreted by Konstantin Mochul'skii as a sign of megalomania,⁶⁶³ and John Elsworth has assisted by pointing out that Belyi's subjectivism reached the "point of solipsism", when he identified the war as the product of his own thoughts about the collapse of European culture.⁶⁶⁴ But Belyi's own attitude to the war was much more multifaceted

658 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. I, p. 17.

659 Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere*, p. 240.

660 *Ibid.*; Wilson, pp. 147-8.

661 Belyi, "O sebe kak pisatele", p. 326.

662 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. II, p. 67.

663 K. Mochul'skii, *Andrei Belyi* (Paris, 1955), p. 191.

664 J.D. Elsworth, *Andrey Bely* (Letchworth, 1972), p. 88.

than that of Ledianoi. The utterance “I am the war”⁶⁶⁵ did not just indicate an admission of personal guilt and a recognition that the fate of the individual was closely intertwined with the historical process of which mankind formed a part. It is also a confirmation of Belyi’s theory about a crisis of the modern consciousness in general, thoughts that he had already put forward in his article “The Crisis of Consciousness and Henrik Ibsen” (“Krizis soznaniia i Genrikh Ibsen”) of 1910 and that he was to elaborate more thoroughly in a series of articles in 1916 and in the book *The Crisis of Culture* (*Krizis kul’tury*, 1920).⁶⁶⁶

Belyi found the accusations that reached him from Russia during the first phase of the war disturbing, branding him, as they did, as a renegade and a traitor, who was listening to the “sounds of heavenly harmonies”, while others were bleeding for Russia.⁶⁶⁷ Whoever was behind this criticism, it was, as we have seen, a far cry from the truth. Belyi complained that he had no practical opportunities to clarify his position, but it was more a question of him not being for the moment mentally fit to make an explanation. Instead Belyi had to suffer in silence, together with Steiner and the other anthroposophists who had remained in Dornach, all victims of the same kind of accusations. It was a situation that could easily be seen through the prism of a Biblical myth. Magnus Ljunggren talks about Belyi’s “Christ syndrome”, a readiness already developed in the writer’s childhood to identify himself with the suffering Christ.⁶⁶⁸ What we see during the war and the revolutions is how Belyi tries to apply this symbol not only to himself, but also to larger entities, starting with the circle of anthroposophists and ending with the whole of Russia. Leonid Ledianoi’s – and Belyi’s – journey from Switzerland to Russia has been interpreted as a reenactment of Christ’s *via dolorosa*.⁶⁶⁹ However, Ledianoi does not grow to the stature of a saviour, as he is not the carrier of higher truth. The Master and his disciples in Dornach were carrying their crowns of thorns and their crosses not because of an opposition to the war, but precisely because they felt themselves to be initiates in a religious truth that mankind had not yet recognized. During the second period of the war Belyi took it as his task to overcome the initial confusion and clarify his outlook on events.

665 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. 11, p. 114.

666 Andrei Belyi, *Na perevale: III. Krizis kul’tury* (Petersburg, 1920).

667 Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere*, p. 237.

668 Magnus Ljunggren, *The Dream of Rebirth: A Study of Andrej Belyi’s Novel Peterburg* (Stockholm, 1982), p. 132.

669 Cioran, p. 182.

Facing Adversity

Fedor Sologub: The War as a Sacrificial Feat

During the whole of 1914 there is an optimistic note in Fedor Sologub's works. The war had been the most successful war for Russia since the days of Peter the Great. The soldiers fought well, because they understood what was at stake, and the prevailing enthusiasm of the Russian people could only be compared to the mood at the time of the battle at Kulikovo.⁶⁷⁰ The latter assertion had nothing of the ambiguity of Belyi's and Blok's interpretations of the same historical event.⁶⁷¹ For Sologub Kulikovo served as an outstanding example of Russian patriotism. After centuries of oppression the Tartar yoke had been overthrown in 1380, and now the time had come for a rebellion against German supremacy. Sologub even had the courage to make a prediction of imminent victory: "Before spring uncovers the valley's damp bed/ Arrogant Berlin will be taken by our troops." ("Prezhde, chem vesna otkroet lozhe vlazhnoe dolin,/ Budet nashimi voiskami vziat zanoshchivyi Berlin.")⁶⁷² This prophecy had originally been pronounced by a French oracle, but Sologub, trusting in the French seer just like Raisa of *The Edge of the Sword* had believed in her Nikandr, immortalized it in his poem "Comfort to Belgium" ("Uteshenie Bel'gii"). What was asked of the Russians was only an effort of will and faith.

However, it soon became obvious that the war would be a protracted conflict and that the nations involved would have to pay a high price. Nor did the war comply with Sologub's idealism. Will and faith did not triumph over matter, and "truth" and "right" appeared to be powerless in the face of aggression. The promises that Sologub had given his readers were broad, and disappointment and even doubts were inevitable. As early as 1915 we see a changed Sologub. Gone is the bellicose tone and the high-flown confidence in a victory of *The Seeing-Off* and the first "war poems", as is the Germanophobia of *The Wreath of Hopes* and *The Edge of the Sword*. This did not mean that Sologub had acquired a more realistic view of the war, as instead he was going deeper into the world of myths. Since Russia had not yet achieved a victory, the course of events must have the function of a trial. The notion of the war as a process of suffering, purification and resurrection emerges as the dominating myth. The ultimate model was Christ who had accepted the crown of thorns, descended into Hell and, nevertheless, won a final victory ("Pobezhdaite").⁶⁷³ In the same

670 Sologub, "Vybor orientatsii", p. 106.

671 See p. 27.

672 Sologub, *Voina*, p. 20 ("Uteshenie Bel'gii").

673 Sologub, *Voina*, p. 18 ("Pobezhdaite").

way Russia should refrain from showing insolent pride, as this was the German way, or from surrendering to pessimism, but should demonstrate a readiness for sacrifice.⁶⁷⁴ The war was a Christian feat, the highest form of self-sacrifice in the name of the renewal of life.⁶⁷⁵ This was true both on an individual and on a national level.

The Russian capture of Przemyśl shortly before Easter 1915 was not only a military feat. Sologub interpreted the event as a sign that the time of suffering – the Calvary drama – was coming to an end, and the moment of triumph was close at hand. In the short stories and poems of the spring of 1915, Przemyśl is part of the holy wonder of Easter. The news about the victory in Galicia leads to moral regeneration (“Vozvrashchenie”) and to a mystical certainty that the blood that has been spilled in the war has not been shed in vain (“Nadezhda voskreseniia”). Russia has been reluctant to accept its historical mission, but now the resurrected Christ leads it out of the darkness towards the future (“Paskha novaia”). Russia has carried the cross of Christ in the war, and thus made itself worthy of a messianic role (“Dukhov den”). Above the evil of trifling everyday life and the bloody war an apocalyptic utopia takes shape:

We are creating a majestic temple,
fused from the living flame,
and the hall of stagnant life
disperses like smoke.*⁶⁷⁶

The cult of suffering and sacrifice acquired its most poignant expression in the play *A Stone Cast Into the Water* (*Kamen' broshennyi v vodu*).⁶⁷⁷ The play had its first night in Khar'kov in November 1915,⁶⁷⁸ but it appears to have been

⁶⁷⁴ Sologub, “Predislovie”, in *Voina v russkoi poezii*, p. 6.

⁶⁷⁵ Tsekhnovitser, p. 196. Tsekhnovitser is quoting “Pochemu simvolisty priniali voinu”.

* “Iz plameni zhivogo slityi,/ My khram torzhestvennyi tvorim,/ I rastochaetsia, kak dym[,]/ Chertog kosneiushchego byta.”

⁶⁷⁶ Sologub, *Alyi mak*, p. 208 (“Est' vdokhnovenie i liubov'...”).

⁶⁷⁷ On the title-page of *Kamen' broshennyi v vodu* both Sologub and his wife Chebotarevskaiia are mentioned as authors. The concrete form of their co-operation is unclear, but since the play has so many obvious connections to the contemporary works of Sologub, I have chosen to treat it as his work. The same decision was made by Aleksandr Blok in his review of the play (Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VI, pp. 306-8). However, it is true that Sologub and Chebotarevskaiia collaborated intimately during the 1910's, and it is quite possible that Chebotarevskaiia also influenced works that are signed by Sologub alone.

⁶⁷⁸ “P'esia Sologuba”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 22.11.1915 15225.

written about six months earlier.⁶⁷⁹ As in the earlier “war-plays”, *A Seeing-Off* and *A Wreath of Hopes*, Sologub starts the action in the summer of 1914, in order to show how the outbreak of war affects a group of Russians. The setting this time is the Upper Volga. Here, far away from the military action, peaceful contemplation and a detached point of view are possible.

Anna Vorontsova, the widow of a general, is living in her manor by the River Volga together with her youngest son Kirill. Her eldest son, Professor Gavriil Vorontsov, arrives together with his young wife Mary, in order to spend the summer in their company. From Moscow comes Mary’s friend Rimma Kritskaia and her latest lover, Mikhail Levchenko. Soon erotic complications arise. Kritskaia, who overtly praises free love and a *carpe diem* philosophy, manages to turn the head of the chaste bachelor Kirill, while Levchenko falls in love with the wife of the professor. Mary is a sensitive, dreamy woman, neglected by her unpractical, absent-minded husband, and she cannot help being flattered by Levchenko’s attentions.

Sologub again depicts the war as a purifying, ennobling force, which alone can avert all temptations. By the last act we have reached December 1914, and the conflicts have already been settled. Mary has become aware of the sanctity of marriage. Levchenko has found his place as an officer in the Russian army, and his letters from the front are full of praise for military discipline as a cure for neurasthenia and lack of character, weaknesses that Sologub was beginning to view as important reasons for the Russian setbacks in the war: “(...) all men should always wear uniform and also do military service in peacetime; regimentation and discipline temper the nerves better than anything else...”⁶⁸⁰ Rimma, who had once been a pleasure-loving egoist, is now working unselfishly in a military hospital in Moscow, while Kirill turned into a hero by giving his life while serving as a medical orderly at the front. The death of Kirill might appear to be a dubious solution to his situation, but Mary’s emotional acclaim of the fallen reveals how precious the notion of martyrdom was for Sologub, as it represents the triumph of idealism over egoism. In a similar vein Sologub paid homage in the poem “To the Boy Scout” (“Boi-skoutu”) to some executed boy-scouts, showing death at war as a victory for humankind. Man has risen from the dust and shown “To what a lofty brink/ man can leap” (“Do kakoi vysokoi grani/ Mozhet prianut’ chelovek”).⁶⁸¹ There is also an erotic

679 The first mention of Sologub’s new play is to be found in “Novye p’esy”, *Birzhevyi vedomosti* 29.8.1915 15055.

680 Fedor Sologub, *Kamen’ broshennyi v vodu (Sem’ia Vorontsovykh): Dramaticheskie stseny v 4 d.* (St. Petersburg, [1915]), p. 39.

681 Sologub, *Voina*, p. 26 (“Boi-skoutu”).

quality to the death of Kirill Vorontsov, an echo from Sologub's past as a "poet of death". Kirill's sacrifice is agreeable to God, as he died young, before having known any woman. He had saved himself for the war "as a fiancé for his fiancée".⁶⁸²

In the spring of 1918 *A Stone Cast into the Water* came into Blok's hands. His written comment on the play, done for a Petrograd theatre, was, to say the least, scathing. To praise the beneficial effect of the war on human character and human relations sounded like naive anachronism in 1918, and Blok dismissed the play without much discussion.⁶⁸³ Because of this he did not pay attention to the broad vision that lay behind the individual human fates in *A Stone Cast into the Water*. It was in fact not only Professor Gavril Vorontsov's marriage that had met with crisis in 1914, but the whole of European civilization, which had reached a crossroad. Sologub looked for the solution to all unsettled problems in the war.

On the threshold of the war, Professor Vorontsov expresses sharp criticism of materialism, or, as he calls it, "quasi-European, bourgeois 'culture'".⁶⁸⁴ Berlin is identified as the centre of this outlook on life, but otherwise Sologub no longer stresses the German element. Materialism is a disease which has affected the entire civilized world and corrupted true European culture. The rapid development of technology has given rise to the promise that man will gradually be able to free himself from all hardships and worries. To pursue the greatest possible comfort has become the goal of life. In this attitude Vorontsov senses the danger of dehumanization: man becomes slave to the things that surround him, an automaton, whose sole activity is to press buttons.

So far Sologub was mainly repeating the interpretation he gave in the first months of the war. What is new is the notion that catastrophes, wars and revolutions were needed to show humankind that it had chosen the wrong way and should do penance.⁶⁸⁵ Professor Vorontsov says this in May 1914, not knowing how soon his plea would be granted. All the evil that had gathered had sooner or later to come to the surface. But the "earthquakes" of history were not only symptoms of the fact that man had gone astray; they had a double function, as they were also signs of a longing for purification and higher ideals. The title of the play, which Sologub perhaps derived from Briusov's poem "Circles on the Water", refers to a thought that is uttered by Levchenko.

682 Sologub, *Kamen' broshennykh v vodu*, p. 38.

683 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VI, pp. 306-8.

684 Sologub, *Kamen' broshennyi v vodu*, p. 17.

685 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Human life and history are like a pond, the calm surface of which is suddenly disturbed by a stone thrown into it. The turmoil spreads in circles, until peace again ensues. Man must greet these periods of unrest with joy, as they form steps on the road towards a transformed world. "Everything Great enters the world through the gates of a sacrificial Feat", says Gavriil.⁶⁸⁶ The false way of humankind is redeemed through the blood sacrifice of the war, and man will adopt a more profound outlook on life.

The historical mission of Russia was to offer an alternative to materialism. The goal of life could not be the attainment of maximal happiness, since the concept of happiness defies all unambiguous definitions, and death inevitably defeats the strivings of the individual. The goal should be freedom not of the body, but of the spirit, and a dignified attitude to life and death.⁶⁸⁷ An essential part of this attitude to life was the knowledge that the road towards the ideal passed along a *via dolorosa*, and that nothing had such an ennobling effect on the soul as suffering. While the people of the West tried to avoid pain, the message of the East was that suffering and joy went together, and that man must carry the cross – in this case the burden of war – without complaint.

In his journalism during the period 1915-1917, Sologub persistently repeated the thoughts of Professor Vorontsov. The war was not the outcome of actions by individuals or even by nations, but a kind of elemental power was to be found behind the events.⁶⁸⁸ Life had been corrupted before the war. The social and ethical contradictions had been sharp. Sologub even added an aesthetic argument, the crisis of art, as an indication of a world gone astray.⁶⁸⁹ Vulgarity, baseness and stagnation had poisoned the air. The process had finally reached a point where the whole of human existence threatened to collapse like an "unstable arch on rotten beams".⁶⁹⁰ Sologub relied heavily on metaphors derived from architecture during the war. With their help he illustrated, like Briusov in "The Last War", how European civilization with its roots in Ancient Greece collapsed in apocalyptic scenes and how a new immaterial, spiritual temple was raised on its ruins.

Events strengthened Sologub in his belief in symbolism. They confirmed the poet's prophetic mission and the unfailing power of artistic intuition, as

686 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

687 Fedor Sologub, "Nabliudeniiia i mechty o teatre", *Russkaia mysl'* 1-2 (1918), part II, p. 7.

688 Fedor Sologub, "Paradoksy s puti: IV. Rodnaia stikhiia", *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 26.3.1916 15464.

689 Fedor Sologub, "Nazhivaiut, kto mozhet", *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 11.9.1916 15795.

690 *Ibid.*

the crisis of modern society was something that especially the symbolists had sensed and expressed in their works.⁶⁹¹ The symbolists had prophetically foreseen a future, inevitable renewal of the world and a complete transfiguration of humanity's spirit.⁶⁹² They had depicted a world that was forced to enter a "sacrificial font" and purify itself in a "tragic baptism of fire". The world could be transformed only through tragedy, through redemptive sacrifices, which would testify that humankind had attained the right attitude to death.⁶⁹³ Out of the sorrows and suffering a "majestic, radiant palace of existence in creation, life in creation" would rise with the shed blood as its binding cement.⁶⁹⁴ The whole foundation of life would be renewed with "wisdom, love and beauty" as its basis.⁶⁹⁵ Coming generations would enter this new life "care-free and joyful" and remember with gratitude those who had paved the way for the future.⁶⁹⁶

As his general utopia was becoming increasingly more immaterial, with the emphasis being transferred from the Slavophile dream of a world-wide triumph of the Russian principle to a general revolution of the spirit, Sologub became more concrete in his criticism and expectations of Russia. There is no genuine dialogue between divergent opinions in *A Stone Cast into the Water*, and a certain hesitation can only be found concerning Russia's development. Gavriil Vorontsov's spiteful tirades against "omnibuses, automobiles, machines",⁶⁹⁷ all seen as expressions of a never-ending craving for comfort, and his warnings against the results of the process of automatization, have a slightly comic ring, uttered as they were in materially backward Russia. As the other characters in the play point out, Russia could not be only spirit, but also needed some outer forms. Sologub gives the landowner Kirill Vorontsov and the engineer Levchenko the task of sketching out a strategy of development that could raise the living standard in Russia, while avoiding Western materialism. The Russian people had to be given the opportunity to discipline their reason and obtain knowledge. The Russian countryside had to be brought to life with the help of the people's own organizational activity, cultural centres,

691 Fedor Sologub, "Vlast' mechty: Otvet M.O. Gershenzonu", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 5.10.1915 15129; Sologub, "Nabliudeniia i mechty o teatre", p. 7.

692 Sologub, "Nazhivaiut, kto mozhet".

693 Sologub, "Nabliudeniia i mechty o teatre", p. 7.

694 Fedor Sologub, "Krov", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 31.12.1916 16012.

695 Sologub, "Nazhivaiut, kto mozhet".

696 Sologub, "Krov".

697 Sologub, *Kamen' broshennyi v vodu*, p. 17.

cooperatives,⁶⁹⁸ and favourable credits. It was a troublesome task to defeat the prevailing inertia, but the war could function as a positive creative force, as it encouraged local initiatives and activities. After the death of Kirill, Gavriil confirms that his brother's dreams have already started to materialize. Sacrificial death has concretely enabled Russia to develop. Thus Sologub, too, was able to rise above the troubles and the doubts of the moment and reaffirm his acceptance of the war.

698 Sologub set great hopes on the cooperative movement. In cooperatives lay the future of the young working Russia, says Petr Ivanych in the short story "Krasavitsa i ospa" (Sologub, *Iaryi god*, p. 147). In the poem "Ne prezirai khoziaistvennykh zabor..." from the summer of 1915 (*Stikhotvoreniia* /Leningrad, 1978/, p. 399), he talks about "the blessed cooperatives". With the help of the archaic attribute of "blessed" (*blagostnye*) and the rhyme "nivy" (the corn-fields) – "kooperativy" (the cooperatives), Sologub stresses the harmonious tie between the cooperative movement and Russian tradition.

The War: Act II (1915-1917)

Defeats and Deadlock: Occasional Verse

In the spring of 1915 a strong German-Austrian offensive was launched on the Eastern front. The Russian armies ran into immediate difficulties. The capture of Przemyśl had been a great Russian triumph in March, but now – only two months later – the town had to be surrendered. In Sologub's short story "Counted Days" ("Sochtennye dni") the loss of the Galician stronghold is mentioned as the occasion of a decisive change in the general mood in Russia.¹ From a symbol of wonder and rebirth Przemyśl turned into an emblem of weakness and lack of endurance.

During the whole of the summer the enemy offensive continued without meeting significant resistance. In late July Zinaida Gippius summarized recent events in her diary:

There has not been a gloomier moment during the whole first year of the war. Most probably not even during our whole life and the life our fathers.

We have given back the whole of Galicia (that's all right), Warsaw has been evacuated. Libava (Liepaja, ВЛ), Vindava (Ventspils, ВЛ), and apparently also Mitava (Jelgava, ВЛ) have been taken, Riga has been abandoned. An extremely strong offensive against us, but we... we have no ammunition!²

Before the autumn the whole of Poland and large parts of Lithuania and Latvia had been lost. With the retreating army, a stream of refugees reached Russia. News about the failure of the armaments industry to supply the army with weapons and ammunition added to the grim reality. National self-confidence was deeply shaken.

The first anniversary of the war occurred at a critical moment. The major newspapers assumed the task of infusing their readers with optimism. Many

1 Fedor Sologub, *Sochtennye dni* (Revel', 1921), p. 7. First publ. in *Al'manakh "Tvorchestvo"*, vol. 2 (Moscow-Petrograd, 1917), pp. 79-101.

2 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 249.

writers also responded to the anniversary, expressing feelings that ranged from quiet sorrow to the inspired patriotic flight of Georgii Ivanov's "The First Anniversary of the War" ("Godovshchina voiny").³ Of the symbolists, Sologub, Briusov and Bal'mont observed the anniversary.

The turn events had taken discredited Fedor Sologub's authority. His major theme of faith and lack of faith had come to be seen in a new light. The unsympathetic Anna Starkina of the early play *The Seeing-Off* had expressed a panicky fear that Russia would turn out to be as badly prepared for a war this time as in 1904.⁴ A year later her warnings had an unintended prophetic ring, while the enthusiasm of her daughter and the Estonian Paul Lippa, the positive heroes of the play, appeared to have been irresponsible. The importance of endurance was repeated in Sologub's new poems, but the calls for faith now had an overtone of desperation: "Only the one faithful to the end enjoys victory,/ only he who believes blindly, even in defiance of fate" ("Naslazhdaetsia pobedoi tol'ko vernyi do kontsa,/ Tol'ko tot, kto slepo verit, khot' sud'be naperekor").⁵ One hope, already expressed in the play *A Stone Cast into the Water*, was that Russia's ordeals would foster a new, active attitude to the fatherland. In the framing stanza of the anniversary poem "Year of Trials, Stern Year" ("God ispytanii, god surovyi"), Sologub writes:

Year of trials, stern year!
The soul blesses thee –
the dawn of a new civic spirit
is burning above us in the skies.*⁶

Valerii Briusov had been spared from witnessing the retreat from Galicia and Poland personally, but the pain expressed in his poetic comments reveals the depth of his distress. In "The Cup of Ordeals" ("Chasha ispytanii") a fear is voiced, that the Russian army, instead of entering Berlin, might even be forced to retreat beyond the Volga and the Urals.⁷ Like Sologub, Briusov wants to believe that misfortune will strengthen Russia. The historical analogy that he

3 Georgii Ivanov, "Godovshchina voiny", *Lukomor'e* 30 (1915), p. 13.

4 Sologub, *Provody*, p. 7.

5 Sologub, *Al'i mak*, p. 189 ("V etot chas").

* "God ispytanii, god surovyi!/ Tebia dusha blagoslovit, –/ Zaria grazhdanstvennosti novoi/ Nad nami v nebesakh gorit."

6 *Ibid.*, p. 191 ("God ispytanii, god surovyi...").

7 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 146 ("Chasha ispytanii"). First publ. as "Zalozhnitsa" in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 6.8.1915 15009.

proposes – the Russian victory over Napoleon *after* Austerlitz, Borodino and the fall of Moscow – shows where Russia's true strength was to be found. It was "the theory of Russia's 'geographical' invincibility" that Briusov fell back on in 1915, when trust in Russian weapons had been thoroughly shattered.⁸

Another poem, "For an Album" ("V al'bom"), is full of wrath at the thought that Russian troops were having to fight without sufficient weapons and ammunition. Briusov expresses his bitterness at what he sees as treachery against the army, but he still does not turn the poem into an accusation, and he leaves the question "why" unanswered. With the help of a rare poetic form – the third line of every stanza becomes the first line of the next stanza – and by repeating word for word the first two lines – "Much can be forgiven,/ much, but not all!" ("Mnogoe možno proshchat',/ Mnogoe, no ved' ne vse zhe!")⁹ – at the end of the poem, Briusov creates a striking impression of thoughts persistently circulating without getting anywhere. "The Cup of Ordeals" with its consoling message had been published in the major newspaper *Birzhevye vedomosti*, whereas "For an Album" was hidden in a private poetry album. Perhaps Briusov assumed that war censorship would not let the poem pass, or he possibly decided not to add to domestic discord by publishing the poem.

Konstantin Bal'mont noted the anniversary of the war with a sonnet "The Night of Nights" ("Noch' nochei"), one of the strongest and most personal of his "war poems":

For the first time in thirty years
I am not praising flowers and singing of kisses.
It seems to me the globe is a bed of torture,
a prison, and over the prison is a dumb blue vault.

My spirit is blinded, deafened, neither dead nor alive,
and expects only sharp, tormenting contacts.
More, more! More sufferings are sent us;
the mead for the devils' feast is made from our blood.

And I, not having tired of dew and scents,
and still loving the babble of bright birds,
vainly wash blood from the most cherished pages.

⁸ Tsekhnovitser, p. 265.

⁹ Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 352 ("V al'bom").

Blood is stewing amid smoke on the heights of Ararat.
 Soon the Night of Nights will have spun to its end,
 and once again blood will spurt from the Lord's face.*¹⁰

At Easter 1915, Bal'mont had "beaten the drum" to instill faith into those who were wavering ("Bei v baraban").¹¹ The war had to be accepted and strength was to be found in the thought of the ultimate goals. Now it might have appeared as if Bal'mont had himself reached a crisis. A personal conflict was added to the general tragedy of the war. By mentioning his private anniversary – his first poems had been published in 1885 – Bal'mont pointed out the conflict between his inner nature, as it had found expression in his poetry, and war. Revealing something of his notorious egocentricism, he accuses the war of upsetting his habits, making him blind and deaf to the wonders of nature, his main source of inspiration, and turning the earth into a torture-chamber. "The Night of Nights" had a startling sub-title, "The Anniversary of the Incantation" ("Godovshchina zakliatiia"). An explanation can be found in a private letter of January 1915, where Bal'mont calls war "evil sorcery".¹² In the poem the evil force behind the curse and the cruel sacrificial feast is not identified. The distinction between friends and foes has been erased, as everybody is subject to the same incantation. The image of St. Sebastian, the martyr, is evoked again, this time referring not to Poland, but to the poet and the whole of humankind. The fact that the war had reached the slopes of Ararat, the second cradle of mankind, leads the poem into the Biblical sphere and explains the title as an allusion to Christ's night in Gethsemane. In the poem, the vision of a coming, apocalyptic "Spring" deserted Bal'mont, as instead he voiced his fears that the betrayal and crucifixion still lay ahead. Bal'mont could later have looked back at "The Night of Nights" as one of his most genuinely prophetic poems of the war period.

* "Za tselykh tridsat' let vot tol'ko pervyi god/ Ne slavliu ia tsvetov i ne poiui lobzani./ Mne mnitsia, Shar Zemnoi est' lozhe istiazanii,/ Tiur'ma, a nad tiur'moi – nemoi lazurnyi svod./ Moi dukh oslep, oglokh, ne umer, ne zhivet,/ Ostriinykh tol'ko zhdet, pytaiushchikh kasanii./ Eshche! Eshche! Eshche nam poslano terzanii,/ Dlia d'iavol'skikh pirov iz krovi nashei – med./ I ia, ne razliubiv rosy i aromata,/ I vse eshche liubia zhurchan'e svetlykh ptits,/ Stiraiu tshchetno krov' s zavetneishikh stranits./ Krov' preet dynami na vysiaxh Ararata./ Uzh skoro Noch' nochei skruzhitsia do kontsa,/ I snova bryznet krov' s Gospodnego litsa."

10 K. Bal'mont, "Noch' nochei", *Utro Rossii* 2.8.1915 211.

11 K. Bal'mont, "Bei v baraban", *Russkoe slovo* 22.3.1915 67.

12 Quoted in Azadovskii, p. 151.

In the autumn of 1915 the Eastern front was stabilized, and relative calm set in. Until the February revolution only insignificant changes occurred at the front. The initial success of the Galician offensive in the summer of 1916 proved to be shortlived, and neither could the countries that only joined the war now influence the general situation. While the war changed into a war of attrition, tensions in the rear were accentuated. Food shortages and price rises put a strain on civilians and led to growing dissent. War-weariness was also felt in the literary field, where a desertion from the genre of “war literature” occurred. By the autumn of 1915 many literary journals appeared almost without any further fictional war material. Even if the period of optimism was definitely over, anti-war feelings could still not be freely expressed. A new “thick journal”, *Letopis'*, that started to appear in early 1916 with Maksim Gor'kii as one of its editors, was considered to be defeatist; but in general the intelligentsia stayed true to the notion of prosecuting the war to its conclusion.

During the first year of the war grand battles had been fought, cities and fortresses had fallen, and millions of soldiers had been taken prisoner. Much of this was reflected in literature, as these were events that corresponded to the traditional view of war. The second period of the war had less of a spectacular nature to offer, and one result was a meagre harvest of occasional poetry. An exception was offered by the Caucasian front. It had been established in the autumn of 1914, when Turkey entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, but despite heavy fighting results remained insignificant for a long time. Far away as it was and difficult to relate to the Russo-German conflict, the Caucasian front attracted little attention among writers. However, in February-March 1916 the Russian army under its commander Nikolai Iudenich enjoyed notable military successes in conquering the Turkish fortresses of Erzerum and Trebizond. The events received wide attention within Russia, as they awoke hopes of a military breakthrough on the Turkish front and once again made the question of Constantinople's future the subject of common concern. The effect upon the public can only be compared to that of the capture of Przemyśl a year earlier.

For Valerii Briusov, who was starving for news of Russian victories, this appeared to be another historic moment. In the poem “Conversation” (“Razgovor”) he revived his concept of world history in the making.¹³ Appealing traits of traditional heroism and classical warfare were to be found in the storming of fortresses. That Briusov needed the capture of Erzerum and Trebizond as proof that modern man had not “grown decrepit”, even after one and

¹³ Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, pp. 229-32 (“Razgovor”).

a half years of world war, shows how trapped he had become by his tendency to look at the present moment from a historical perspective. Even his year in Poland had not been able to change his idea of how war should look and how it should be fought.

The dream of Tsar'grad also received a new and final lease of life. Briusov's "Conversation" is constructed as a dialogue between the Black Sea and a fortress tower in Constantinople. As in "In the Carpathians", the geographical locations side with the conqueror and rejoice at the Russian victories. The tower has been mourning since the withdrawal of the fleet of the Allied Powers, but now the Black Sea brings it the news of a Russian offensive. As in Briusov's Galician poem, Russian imperialism is objectified, as even nature is longing to be liberated by Russian arms.

Konstantin Bal'mont responded to the Caucasian feat of the Russian army with the poem "Not a bell, the singer of bronze thoughts..." ("Ne kolokol, slagatel' mednykh dum..."). This chauvinistic outburst showed how easily influenced Bal'mont could be, and it made the war-weariness of "The Night of Nights" look like disappointment at Russian military defeats. In the new poem Bal'mont took open pride in the conquest of the Turkish town: "The Caucasian line reached a foreign stronghold,/ and, with the cry of 'Russia', Erzerum was overthrown." ("Kavkazskii stroi prishel k chuzhoi tverdye,/ I klichem 'Rus' nizvergnut Erzerum.")¹⁴ In passing Bal'mont also celebrated Armenia and Georgia, their languages and cultures, but they are seen from a Great-Russian standpoint, merely as extensions of Russian military power. Just as in the case of Poland, Bal'mont perceives the future as an unbroken alliance between Russia and its border nations, advantageous for all participants: "We, the Russians, are mighty in the mountains – with you,/ so let us be together like the whirlwind and the thunder." ("My, russkie, v goriakh moguchi – vami,/ Tak budem vmeste vikhrem i gromami.")¹⁵

The Brusilov offensive in the summer of 1916 left few traces in contemporary Russian fiction, perhaps a sign of growing mistrust in news of victories. Valerii Briusov turned his attention instead to some minor incidents of the war. In April 1916 Germany declared unrestricted submarine warfare, a decision that prompted new accusations of barbarity. Briusov reacted with a poem, "The Feast of the Fishes" ("Ryb'e prazdnestvo"), in which the fish of the English Channel praise the German Emperor for delivering meat to them.¹⁶ Nature is

14 K. Bal'mont, "Ne kolokol, slagatel' mednykh dum...", in "Vecher K.D. Bal'monta", *Utro Rossii* 14.2.1916 45.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 11, pp. 228-9 ("Ryb'e prazdnestvo").

rejoicing, but the tone of the poem is satirical – a rare trait in Briusov’s poetry. While the enemy spreads death and transforms human beings into fish-food, the Allied Powers, by contrast, demonstrate selfless courage. A newspaper item about a French aviator, who after having dropped bombs in Germany immediately crossed the Alps to Italy, caught the attention of Briusov in November 1916. As the pilot was on the “right side”, Briusov did not express any outrage, but interpreted the feat as an example of lofty heroism, the very opposite of the base behaviour of the enemy deep down in the oceans. The tsars mentioned in the title of the poem, “Fallen tsars” (“Padshie tsari”), were the Alps, which throughout history had formed a virtually impassable barrier for man, but now they had been defeated by a lonely hero.¹⁷ It cannot be ruled out that the title also included a revolutionary message, although there are no indications of a revolutionary spirit in Briusov at this time.

Viacheslav Ivanov: Behind the German Threat – China!

In his book on the theme of Russian writers and the First World War, Orest Tsekhnovitser makes an annoying mistake. He erroneously attributes to Viacheslav Ivanov poems and a foreword for an unpublished volume dating from 1915 that is found in Ivanov’s archive. The real author was in fact Viacheslav Bushuev (real name Butakov), a minor poet born around 1883.¹⁸ Bushuev expressed his bitterness about the European war, while refusing to put the blame solely on Germany. As militarism had been growing stronger in all European countries, some other nation would have started the war, if Germany had not done so. The prevailing belief that militarism could be defeated through war and that the present war would be the last one was rejected by Bushuev as an illusion.¹⁹

A contrary message was in fact voiced in the works of Ivanov published during the years 1915-1917. Reality had turned out to be resistant to theory, and the transfiguration process had deformed more than beautified the visage of Russia, but Ivanov preferred to turn his back on distressing facts and to cling staunchly to abstract ideas. He had confessed a love for the metaphysical rather than the empirical Russia, but he still found it impossible to lend his

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 11, pp. 227-8 (“Padshie tsari”).

¹⁸ See Gennadii Obatnin, “Tri epizoda iz predystorii kholodnoi voiny”, in *Evropa v Rossii, Rossiia v Evrope: Sbornik statei* (M., 2010), pp. 257-60. I would like to thank Obatnin for resolving the question of authorship.

¹⁹ Quoted in Tsekhnovitser, pp. 273-5.

voice to growing criticism of the regime. Instead he chose to urge his compatriots not to lose faith in the supreme value of *sobornost'*. The decisive factor ought not to be military might but spiritual power. To admire the strength of the enemy was dangerous, as it could lead to an acceptance of the German ideal of organization: "In our struggle against the Germanic nations, we run the risk of poisoning ourselves with the most pernicious of all the poisons that there is in its sick body."²⁰ Instead of giving birth to an all-Christian spiritual community, the war would in that case end in the victory of the Antichrist. Rational planning was needed, but organization should remain a practical rule, and not the highest ideal and goal of humankind.

As Russian reality offered very little proof of spiritual unity, Ivanov turned his attention to France and England, hoping that the example of the Allied Powers would dispel Russian fears that German organizational capacity was undefeatable and that the German claim on the legacy of world empire was thus legitimate. Slavonic unity was another cornerstone in Ivanov's thinking that he could not abandon, even in a situation when the whole of Poland was lost and Bulgaria had joined Russia's enemies:

My thoughts go especially to the Slavonic people of the future, free and happily reunited, finding in the word (Slavdom, ВН) itself a guarantee for the hope that we Slavs shall not have 'to live apart' 'eternally', not forever having to fear for the fate of our individual national souls, but that we shall come together in true *sobornost'* and through it utter our universal word to the world.²¹

Vague premonitions and some external indications still convinced Ivanov that the individualistic and nationalistic separation of peoples was only a transitional period in the history of humankind and that the future belonged to universal collectivism. The nucleus of this utopia was the Slavonic peoples. United by a common cultural "energy", they formed a totality with a unique, universal mission.²² After nationwide *sobornost'* had been established in Russia, a Slavonic colossus was to be created. Ivanov took pains to stress the difference between an empire, based on external force, and the future Slavonic giant, which would be based on Christianity: "Without Christ, the Slavonic feeling of being chosen for a universal feat turns into a racial theory, feeble

²⁰ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 254 ("Legion i sobornost").

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

²² *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 662-3 ("Pol'skii messianizm kak zhivaia sila").

and unjustified to its core, and the future unification of the Slavs becomes a compulsory organized, imperialistic collective.”²³ In a Slavonic community individuals would not lose their unique traits, as they had in Germany, where the cult of an impersonal, nationalistic “I” had killed individual features. Only in Christ could a lasting unification be created and true individuality be developed.²⁴

Just like Blok and Belyi, Ivanov remained true to the legacy of Vladimir Solov’ev, even on issues which seemed to be of no contemporary concern. The Russo-Japanese war had been for him the “First Punic War” with “yellow Asia”, the first in a row of conflicts between Christianity and the Asian religions.²⁵ But only in late 1915 could Ivanov present a scheme that allowed him to combine these latent conflicts with the present war: Germany was, after all, a factor of secondary importance, as it was the sinister face of China that could be detected behind German culture. The bonds were not of an external, political kind but were purely spiritual. Both Germany and China related to the world through subjective idealism and idealistic normativism, something Nietzsche had been aware of when calling Kant a “Chinese from Königsberg”. Furthermore, both nations had developed a similar collective psychology, a “consciousness of the anthill”. Willingly or unwillingly Germany thus functioned as China’s advocate in Europe. So far the war had been a *concealed* struggle between “yellow Asia” and Europe, but Ivanov predicted the coming of a time, when the war would be concretely transferred onto Asian ground. In the same way as Germany was utilizing Turkey and Islam for its own goals in the World War, it would try to use China in future conflicts.²⁶

As the inner essence of the “Yellow Peril” was the attempt to de-christianize Europe, a Christian defence had to be built up on Asian territory after the war. Ivanov outlined a grandiose plan to neutralize and finally christianize Asia through Russian and English cooperation. He showed some sympathy for France, as Paris, according to him, had the traits of an all-human (*vsechelovecheskii*) city,²⁷ but, like Sologub, he held England to be Russia’s closest ally.²⁸ Instead of German capital, Russia should encourage English investments, while

23 *Ibid.*, p. 661.

24 *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 256–8 (“Legion i sobornost”).

25 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 322 (“O russkoi idee”).

26 Ivanov, “Rossiia, Angliia i Aziia”.

27 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 567 (“Parizh”). First publ. in *Parizh nakanune voiny* (Petrograd, 1916), p. 102.

28 Ivanov appeared during the war at the Society for a Rapprochement with England and at the Society of the English Flag – signs of his sympathy for that country (*Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 737 n. 190).

Russia should for its part offer England its culture. From England, Russia also had to learn political culture, social psychology and the regulation of freedom, as *sobornost'* also needed external forms.²⁹

Russia and England were united by the fact that they were the only European great powers also to be Asian powers. Ivanov could again relate to Dostoevskii, who had seen Asia as a natural object for both England and Russia and as an arena for future historical conflicts. Europe had to build a shelter against the "Yellow Peril", and it had to be "the living wall" of these two white Asian powers. Together England and Russia would form an unshakable bulwark for Christian sociality in Asia. Furthermore, they needed an Asian ally to counteract the German-Chinese axis, and such an ally was to be found in the form of India. India was the basis for England's present and future power, and India in turn needed the organizing culture of Europe in order to develop. Russia had to support English interests in India and surrounding areas, while England in turn had to back up Russian claims on Constantinople.³⁰

Russia was facing a serious crisis in the war, but Ivanov dreamed of a coming universal Christian collective. Not only was a national and a Slavonic *sobornost'* necessary, but so also was the unification of Christian consciousness in its entirety, that is of the Eastern, Roman and English churches. Ivanov remained silent about the future of Protestantism. After the Christian unification, Asia was to be christianized, while Europe in turn would benefit from the spiritual energy of India. A Russo-Anglo-Indian alliance had a concrete strategic function, but its true purpose was "the free unification of the ancient Asian soul with the soul of the future universal Christian humanity".³¹

In his poetry Ivanov also sporadically confirmed his belief in Russia's historical mission, the coming transfiguration of humankind and the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.³² Even death at war was incorporated into this utopian thought. At the end of 1915 Ivanov published three poems, written in memory of those who had given their lives for Russia in the war. Two of them, "Here, in God's temples, prayers are made..." ("Zdes', v khramakh Bozh'ikh, tvo-riat molitvy...") and "Written down in the annal by a friendly hand..." ("Zane-seny v skrizhali druzheskoi rukoiu..."), had the form of liturgical prayers, a poetic subgenre fully in harmony with Ivanov's view of the poet's calling. An

29 Ivanov, "Rossiia, Angliia i Aziia".

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 See for example Ivanov, "Búdi, búdi!", *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 51. First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 25.12.1916 298.

aspect of the war that Ivanov only now brought up was Russia's defence of other Slavonic nations, its "unfortunate brothers".³³ However, this task formed only a small part of Russia's war aims. By believing in Holy Russia, above which "the light of Christ" was lingering, and by sacrificing their lives for its "sacred cause", the soldiers were in fact performing God's deeds. This was the message of "A Lament for the Warriors Who Have Been Killed" ("Plach po ubiennym voinam").³⁴

The literary value of these poems was modest, as Ivanov made no attempt to avoid the standard, impersonal vocabulary of traditional patriotic poetry. Thus, even the genuinely messianic dimension of a poem like "Here, in God's temples..." was lost:

For the honour and glory of your native land
you gave your lives, you are no more!
A flock of mighty eagles perished
for the fatherland's honour, for the world's happiness!*

Ivanov had simultaneously begun writing a more important literary work, a lengthy cycle of poems called "Man" ("Chelovek"). With John 17:21 ("May everything be one") as its starting point, "Man" offered a mystical interpretation of the fate of humankind. People were in reality not each other's enemies, but doubles, as humanity formed "one man". The notion of humankind as a "supra-individual 'personality'",³⁶ a thought that Ivanov also found in the works of Dostoevskii,³⁷ had always been a source of inspiration for him, and during the war it found expression in his dream of universal *sobornost'*. The spirit of "Man" differs from Ivanov's other works of this period, in that here he is able to rise above the barriers of war and also acknowledge the divine spirit in the enemy. The explanation for this is the future-directed approach of "Man": it is an attempt to look away from the present moment into a divine future. Since

33 Viacheslav Ivanov, "Zaneseny v skrizhali družheskoi rukoiu...", *Niva. Eshchemesiachnye literaturnye i populiarno-nauchnye prilozheniia* 11 (1915), p. 394.

34 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 34 ("Plach po ubiennym voinam").

* "Za chest' i slavu rodnogo kraia/ Vy zhizn' otdali, vas bol'she net!/ Orlov moguchikh pogibla staia/ Za chest' otchizny, za schast'ia svet!"

35 Viacheslav Ivanov, "Zdes' v khramakh Bozh'ikh, tvoriat molitvy...", *Niva. Eshchemesiachnye literaturnye i populiarno-nauchnye prilozheniia* 11 (1915), p. 394.

36 Averintsev, p. 51.

37 Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life: A Study in Dostoevsky* (New York, 1960), pp. 56-7.

“Man” was only finished in 1919 and published in 1939, it also has the benefit of hindsight.³⁸

During the first two years of the war Ivanov had stayed in Moscow. In the summer of 1916 he travelled with his family to Sochi, in order to spend a few months in the Caucasus and work on various literary projects.³⁹ He actually remained in Sochi for over a year, alienated from a war that did not conform with his theories. When he returned to Moscow late in the summer of 1917, it was to a new Russia.

Fedor Sologub: “Our Children Will Save Russia...”

During the second year of the war Fedor Sologub was beset by growing doubt about Russia's capacity to pass the test of the war. The search for a way out of the crisis is reflected in his journalism. He is still trying to cling to a belief in the unique endowments of the Russian people and their potential creative force. In the same way that the educated classes had been excluded from political and social activity, to the considerable detriment of the country,⁴⁰ the masses had also not been given a chance to cultivate their gifts. When the Russian peasant finally took his place in the national parliament, the countryside would change through his indefatigable work. Sologub had a vision of a huge network of roads, community clubs, schools and hospitals.⁴¹ What was needed was a true civic spirit, which Sologub hoped would be fostered by the war.

Meanwhile the war had to be continued. The worldwide, historical task which Russia had accepted could not be abandoned.⁴² History showed that even if Russia had been under serious threat many times, it had always managed to defend itself with God's help (“Ognedyshushchei grozoiu...”).⁴³ Once again the Russian people had to mobilize their courage and spiritual strength,

38 The correlation between “Chelovek” and Ivanov's wartime articles and poetry is the subject of G.V. Obatnin's article “K opisaniyu pozitsii Viacheslava Ivanova perioda pervoi mirovoi vojny” (*Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 26 /1997/, pp. 148-154).

39 O. Deshart, “Vvedenie”, in Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 1, p. 142.

40 Fedor Sologub, “Obyvatel'skoe”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 17.9.1915 15093.

41 Fedor Sologub, “Paradoksy s puti: My i oni”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 10.2.1916 15376.

42 Fedor Sologub, “Proгноzy: II. Voskresenie slova”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 11.1.1917 16032.

43 Fedor Sologub, “Ognedyshushchei grozoiu...”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 21.11.1915 15223. Also publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 25.12.1915 15290.

and the magic formula was – Sologub repeated it tirelessly – the words “I will”: “He who really wants a victory must win, as in the very act of his proper manifestation of will there lies an unconquerable power.”⁴⁴

But was it any longer possible to believe in Russia, or had the exhortation to be resolute become an empty phrase? And where was the power that could change Russia? These are the questions that Sologub posed in his last major fictional work of the war period, the short story “Counted Days” (“Sochtennye dni”). The story was only published in 1917, but it was clearly written two years earlier. Its action takes place in the summer of 1915 on the Upper Volga, the same part of Russia where the people at Vorontsov’s estate in December 1914 had been able to take an optimistic view of the war and Russia’s future. The atmosphere is now completely different from that in *A Stone Cast into the Water*. A depressed mood reigns among the summer guests because of the military defeats. People are tense and touchy, and conflicts that had earlier been invisible now come to the surface. Among those who are spending their summer by the Volga are Professor Boris Kratnyi and his family. With his perpetual demands for faith in Russia and victory, Kratnyi appears to be Sologub’s alter ego. Victory is not dependent only upon the army, but also upon the civilians. But the debacles of the war have caused Kratnyi to lose his authority. His words have a pathetic ring and are met with silence from the others. Deep down even Kratnyi feels that his faith has been thoroughly shaken.

Kratnyi’s main opponent is the local teacher Pavel Kozlov. He is marked by his name: Pavel is the name of the unsympathetic, pro-German teacher Pavel Buravov in *The Edge of the Sword*, and Kozovalov is one of the bad patriots in *The Seeing-Off*. Like them, Kozlov has no belief in Russia, but this time Sologub allows more space for the arguments of the doubter. The problem is no longer the intelligentsia’s love of Germany, but rather their lack of faith in the Russian people. Kozlov bases his criticism upon observation, and he expresses himself with a self-assurance that Kratnyi lacks: “We cannot cope with the Germans (...). Just think of it, in their soldiers’ knapsacks lie the works of Goethe,⁴⁵ while half of our Christ-loving warriors cannot read and write. And furthermore, we have no order whatsoever. No, we cannot cope with the Germans.”⁴⁶ Kozlov also complains about an inner weakness in the Russians: “We cannot even

44 Fedor Sologub, “Khochu i veriu”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 3.1.1917 16016.

45 Sologub could have taken this phrase from German propaganda, but it is also possible that he had read Andrei Bely’s article of April 1916, “Sovremennye nemtsy”, where the same detail was to be found.

46 Sologub, *Sochtennye dni*, p. 19.

really want anything. Everyone is just like some neurasthenic. How can anyone even compare us to the Germans?"⁴⁷

A ferryman, the representative of the people, has also reached the conclusion that the Germans cannot be defeated and that Russia consequently must ask for peace. He is not a mythical holy man like Nikandr in *The Edge of the Sword*, but a realistically drawn, war-weary peasant. The countryside has been emptied of labourers, and the women openly mourn the fact that their sons have been taken, as they say, "to be slaughtered".⁴⁸ The defeats have accentuated class antagonism; everywhere the summer guests are met with hostility. The owner of a tea-house, where they rest for a while, shows his open hatred of "masters" who without working enrich themselves through the war.

"Counted Days" shows the truth of the claim that a strong conviction is infectious. In the evening after a discussion with Kratnyi, Kozlov is prepared to admit that the professor is right after all: "If we all listen to reason, then the Germans cannot hold out against us."⁴⁹ But Kratnyi in turn has adopted Kozlov's defeatism: "We have no wish to exert power, to control state affairs (...). And no will to go to war, to achieve a victory."⁵⁰ The comparisons with Germany are now discouraging: "Side by side with Russia is Germany. Side by side with us there lives an honest and hard-working people, people who know what they want and know how to attain their goals. What can we put up against them? Millions of weak wills, yawnings and stretchings?"⁵¹ Kratnyi dismisses the idea that the political system is to blame, and instead, like Sologub himself, he explains the failure by weaknesses in the national character. Most of the outspoken pro-war symbolists underwent a similar, painful process of re-evaluating their image of the Russian people at this stage of the war.

Despite growing popular dissatisfaction and his own disheartening analysis of the situation, Professor Kratnyi is no more prepared to accept a separate peace with Germany than his creator, Sologub. Sologub stuck to his conviction that an armed conflict between Germany and Russia had been inevitable and that consequently an overhasty conclusion of peace would only have meant postponing the clash. The peasant's words about the people's sufferings are dismissed by the narrator, who complains that the lament created a stuffy atmosphere even out on the river. It is indirectly asserted that it is the task of

47 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

51 *Ibid.*

the educated classes to solve questions concerning the war, as they are better able to understand its causes and goals. Kratnyi's choice is unambiguous: the war must be fought, even if it leads to the fall of the Russian Empire. In a moment of gloom he imagines that in the future the Russian language will be studied like Latin and Ancient Greek today, and that even the area around the Volga will be Germanized: "German peasants, honest, hard-working, will settle here and German speech will sound in the famous towns of Moskau and Neugard-am-Volga."⁵² This scene forms the terminal point of the educated classes' involvement in the war in the works of Sologub. Committed to their theories, they would rather sacrifice their own country and people than reconsider their attitude to the war. However, from Sologub's point of view this was a correct conclusion. Germany and Russia could not live side by side, but had to fight a war of extinction, and if the Russians were unable to mobilize either faith or will at this historical moment, they had to perish.

However, the peripeteia in "Counted Days" is not the spiritual capitulation of Professor Kratnyi. In 1914 Sologub had used a volcanic eruption as a metaphor for the war. Now he chose another apocalyptic symbol, fire, and set it to devastate, not Europe, but Russia. Some malicious villagers set the professor's *dacha* on fire and he watches helplessly as not only the house, but also the manuscript of his new book are destroyed in the flames. The symbolism of the scene is obvious. The war has turned into a hostile force, which threatens to destroy the life-style and achievements of the Russian intelligentsia. The catastrophe makes them homeless, but they lack the strength of initiative to prevent the disaster. The fact that the catastrophe is a just nemesis, rather than a useful lesson in suffering, has an additional paralyzing effect.

The rescue in "Counted Days" comes from an unexpected quarter. Kratnyi has always looked upon his children as mediocrities. Their lives have been incomprehensible to him. Even when his neighbour's son goes to war as a volunteer and his own daughter Vera decides to follow him as a nurse, Kratnyi sees this as disheartening proof of how easily the younger generation adopts alien patterns of behaviour. But the fire reveals a new side of the young generation. The children do not remain bewildered and passive, but act resolutely. "Simply and skilfully" they rescue the professor's papers from the fire. The external forms of the intelligentsia's lives are demolished, but the products of their intellects are saved for the future. The children had not participated in their parents' discussions about the war, but Kratnyi now draws the conclusion that the fears of the older generation are unknown to them. Because of

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 32-3.

this he is prepared to delegate responsibility for the war and Russia's future to them. Life will be built on a completely new basis by the younger generation: "The romanticism of great feats will perhaps die, the solemn catchwords fade, but instead a completely different life will be built, not like ours, but a simple, solid, and in its own way happy life."⁵³

The title of the short story has been seen as ambiguous. The intelligentsia pessimistically assumes that the days of Russia are over, while the young people see only the days of the old political and social system as numbered.⁵⁴ This is not altogether correct, as the protagonist, Professor Kratnyi, in fact manages to regain his belief in the future of Russia. It is also of importance that we see events solely from Kratnyi's point of view. His thoughts about the younger generation are never objectively confirmed, and they might just as easily be the result of wishful thinking. What we are left with is a feeling that the moment for a decision has come, but that future prospects are still difficult to interpret.

Three summers in succession on the Volga and an extensive lecturing tour during the first half of 1916 gave Sologub a chance to see for himself how provincial Russia was coping with the burdens of war. The trips were not only the expression of a wish to get away from the depressing life of Petrograd, but also of a search for the genuine Russia.⁵⁵ His lecture – "Russia in dreams and expectations" ("Rossiia v mechtakh i ozhidaniiax") – was, moreover, an attempt to infuse belief in the future and show a way to salvation. The result of the war had to be "Russia's new word to humankind. And this has to be a synthesis of the technically strong West and the dreamy, religious East."⁵⁶

In his articles and sketches of 1915-1917, Sologub honestly described what he saw, heard and felt, even if it was in glaring contrast to his theory about the benevolent effect of the war and his initial, idealized image of the Russian people. The economic crisis had led to high prices and long queues, and people had become entirely preoccupied with material things.⁵⁷ Corruption had grown out of hand, and unscrupulous speculators were openly benefitting from the misfortunes of their countrymen.⁵⁸ Instead of idealism and patriotism Sologub met quarrelsomeness, crude manners, greed and panic. Contrary to his predictions, the odious petty-bourgeois spirit had not been defeated, but

53 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

54 Leitner, p. 165.

55 Sologub, "Paradoksy s puti: My i oni".

56 "Lektsiia F.K. Sologuba", *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 23.10.1915 15165.

57 Fedor Sologub, "Nazhivaiut, kto mozhet".

58 Fedor Sologub, "Est' chestnost'!", *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 26.6.1916 15641.

appeared to have won a complete victory.⁵⁹ In the autumn of 1915 Sologub saw the area around the Upper Volga as a “land of bread and health”, a place where people worked, instead of complaining, as they did in the capital;⁶⁰ but the following summer he was forced to admit that the negative effects of the war were spreading all over Russia.

Sologub did not give only political or economic explanations for the destitution and moral decline that he witnessed. Where earlier he had idealized the Russian character, he now singled out indifference and lack of initiative as fatal Russian features.⁶¹ He made depressing comparisons with Europeans and Russian Jews,⁶² ending in a merciless national self-criticism: “We do not care about our duties, we cannot do anything properly, we cheat and lie in a masterly fashion, we steal anything we can lay our hands on. We call theft a prank, we laugh at humaneness as we might at foolishness, we say about honourable work: you cannot earn stone-built palaces through righteous work.”⁶³

Sologub's journalism of the winter of 1915-1916 shows how his hopes and beliefs are gradually transferred to the coming generations. It is not openly stated, but the war is, in fact, pushed into the background as if it were a lost cause. The necessary act of will had not materialized. Losses in the war are no longer the price paid in order to make the enemy halt, but sacrifices made in order that life may be renewed. Victory will be won by the future Russia. “We are in no hurry”, Sologub wrote in February 1916. “If we do not win now, we will win when we have finally become sober and learned how to read and write. Victory won't escape us. Some time in the future we will win; this I believe in the name of Russia.”⁶⁴

When Sologub talks about the present Russia, he often visualizes it as a house, while the coming, transformed Russia is seen as a palace or temple. What the Russians have been missing is the feeling of being masters in their own house. The cry of Liza Starkina in *The Seeing-Off* – “It is time for us to become masters in our own house...” – was a war-cry against the alleged German physical, economic and spiritual presence in Russia.⁶⁵ Now the same call

59 Fedor Sologub, “Dva puti”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 1.10.1915 15121.

60 Fedor Sologub, “V strane khleba i zdorov'ia. I”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 9.10.1915 15137; “Paradoksy s puti: My i oni”.

61 Fedor Sologub, “S tarakanami”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 9.6.1916 15607; Sologub, “Zhem-chuzhina bez opravy”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 23.10.1916 15879.

62 Fedor Sologub, “Sravnitel'no: Iz putevykh zametok”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 9.12.1916 15973.

63 Fedor Sologub, “Prava i obiazannosti”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 14.8.1916 15739.

64 Fedor Sologub, “Paradoksy s puti: O prezrenii k vremeni i o prezrenii voobshche”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 5.2.1916 15366.

65 Sologub, *Provody*, p. 1.

is changed into an accusation against the Russians themselves for not having taken responsibility for their own country. The older generation has been crippled by the historical experience which fostered a slave mentality. It is a lost generation, whose sole function is to serve as a bridge to the future. Through its suffering, it is paving the way for the coming, true man.⁶⁶

In his search for miracles, Sologub had – as can be seen from “Counted Days” – found a new object of faith, Russian youth. In contemporary young people Sologub perceived psychological features which were completely new for Russia. They display will-power and self-confidence, and civic feelings are something self-evident for them. All this indicated a bright future for Russia: “One feels in everything that these boys and girls will enter life as its born masters, as the real masters of our great home, our fatherland. They will enter it in order to make a worthy use of life, and with a sublime effort of creativity they will complete the majestic building of Russia.”⁶⁷ After a lapse into despair, Sologub again predicted – and thus consciously tried to influence the future – that the fulfilment of the longed-for historical moment was after all drawing closer. “When we all pass away, our children will save Russia”, it is said in the short story “Evening Light” (“Svet vechernii”).⁶⁸ In a lecture given in January 1916, Sologub even produced a timetable: “It is coming closer, the epoch of the new people, who are fated to enter the world not now, but in about fifteen years, when a strong generation, called to renew life, will have grown up.”⁶⁹

Children and young people had always occupied a prominent position in the works of Sologub. In his treatment of the youth motif three stages have been singled out. In the earliest short stories children were associated with a “state of pastoral innocence, with a back-to-nature orientation.”⁷⁰ In the next stage the conflict between the world of children and the world of grown-ups was stressed. The children become aware of the ugliness of life, the evils and cruelties of their surroundings, and prefer to seek refuge in death.⁷¹ In the third period (1907-1914) “the child is tied to the notion of creative fantasy and its power to transform life.”⁷² The critic Stanley Rabinowitz implicitly assumed

66 Sologub, *Kamen' broshennyi v vodu*, p. 15.

67 Fedor Sologub, “Prezhdevremennyye izbirateli: Iz putevykh zametok”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 11.12.1916 15979.

68 Sologub, *Iaryi god*, p. 136 (“Svet vechernii”).

69 Quoted in B. Sadovskoi, “Fedor Sologub o sovremennom teatre”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 17.1.1916 15328.

70 Rabinowitz, p. 19.

71 Carola Hansson, *Fedor Sologub as a Short-Story Writer: Stylistic Analyses* (Stockholm, 1975), p. 8.

72 Rabinowitz, p. 19.

that children seldom appear in Sologub's works after 1914.⁷³ In reality, the war years form a fourth period, where children are given a somewhat new function. They stand for the future and the coming ideal man. During the war children have an important task in the battle against pessimism and defeatism. A repugnant Russian reality and negative European influence have not severed children's bonds with the mystical East, and therefore they can function as the conscience and support of adults in short stories like "The Wedding Ring" ("Obruchal'noe"), "The Boy Who Did Not Freeze" ("Nezamerzaiushchii mal'chik") and "Take Off Your Mourning Clothes" ("Snimi traur").

An important thought for Sologub was that the approaching, decisive change of generation had to be prepared through a re-education of man. Professor Vorontsov in *A Stone Cast into the Water* sees the reason for the evil of modern life in misguided upbringing. Hitherto man had been formed into an egoist, who shied away from hardships and suffering. Now it had become a patriotic duty to bring up a generation, which would not be drawn towards materialistic European culture, but would have a Slavonic identity of its own. The new generation would not grow tired half-way, but would only feel inspired by the burdens of life. Both the pedagogical approach and the inspiring ideal are demonstrated in Sologub's wartime stories.⁷⁴

Sologub's criticism of the human ideal of the decadents had already begun, as Andreas Leitner has pointed out, in a short story of 1910, "Naive Meetings" ("Naivnye vstrechi").⁷⁵ In "Calm Heat" ("Tikhii znoi") from the war period, we are again confronted with decadent "half-people".⁷⁶ Katia and Nikolai Lozhbinin are neurasthenics from the big city. They are night-people, who sleep late in the morning, fear cold and spend most of their time indoors. Katia's sister Ol'ga, who herself radiates health and strength, reproaches the couple: "A weak, nervous generation (...). The only hope is that their children will be different. I want to see your children strong and brave."⁷⁷

In the wartime works we meet many children and young people of this kind. Their appearance already reveals their difference. Gone are the pale, large-eyed, tired children from Sologub's early short stories, and instead we see well-built, tanned and hardy individuals. The former feeling of alienation

73 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

74 It is also noteworthy that Sologub's interest in the school's role as an educator again increased during the World War (see, for example, his articles in *Birzhevyi vedomosti* 22.7.1915 14979, 27.7.1915 14989, 4.9.1915 15067).

75 Leitner, p. 122.

76 Sologub, *Iaryi god*, p. 119 ("Tikhii znoi").

77 *Ibid.*

has been replaced by a thirst for life. "There is nothing better than life", says Katia in "Indefatigability" ("Neutomimost").⁷⁸ These children have been given a Spartan upbringing, the aim of which is to give them an ascetic life style and physical and spiritual strength. The natural elements play an important role. Leitner has observed that characters in Sologub's later works have to expose themselves to the four natural elements – water, air, sun and wind – in order to find themselves and preserve their natural qualities.⁷⁹ It is also a question of physically hardening the organism by exposing the body to the sun, the sea winds, ice-cold water and snow. Bare feet are a recurrent detail.⁸⁰ Thus, during the winter, Liza ("Pravda serdtsa", "Obruchal'noe kol'tso"), Grisha ("Nezamerzaiushchii mal'chik"), Dimka ("Ded i vnuk") and Valentina ("Tri lampady") walk barefoot indoors or even outdoors in the snow.⁸¹

The new generation would not only be physically strong, but would also possess willpower, the lack of which had caused the defeats of the war. The goal was, as Ol'ga in "Calm heat" says, for children to become "masters and commanders of life, forging their fate according to their will".⁸² The formation of a new human type was therefore also an important patriotic task, as it would ensure Russia's survival and future greatness. In the short story "Tirelessness" ("Neutomimost") the coming change of generations is given a comprehensible shape. The point in time is the end of the summer of 1915, which allows the military catastrophes of that year to be reflected. The adults have performed their duty in the war and paid a high price. The infantry captain Aleksei Nikolaevich has returned an invalid, while his friend, an artillery ensign, has been injured in battle and taken prisoner. However, in the eyes of their children this is not enough. Fifteen-year-old Lavrik and his friend Katia make their parents responsible for the fact that Russia has not yet been victorious in the war. They do not comment on the lack of military resources, but see the problem only as a question of character. Lavrik says to his father:

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 170 ("Neutomimost").

⁷⁹ Leitner, p. 122.

⁸⁰ Sologub's cult of naked legs and feet was part of the contemporary revolt against clothes and shoes. To touch the earth with the naked foot was an expression of naturalness and freedom (Holthusen, p. 70; Leitner, p. 69). In connection with the war, Sologub gave also this detail the concrete function of physically strengthening the human body.

⁸¹ Against this background it does not come as a surprise to find Sologub in a poem from 1923, "Al'kogol'naia zybkaia v'iuga...", describing how he himself loves to walk barefoot for two to three hours in the evenings in Petrograd (Sologub, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 480).

⁸² Sologub, *Iaryi god*, p. 122 ("Tikhii znoi").

You are heroes, but not warriors. You are able to perform deeds that would have scared off even the most famous heroes of history, though in the end you are too heroic. You are suited for exploits, for self-sacrifice, your goal is fame, and if you win then it is by chance. But we will become warriors. Not heroes, but machines for victory. And nobody will defeat us. Through us Russia will become strong and invincible. And nobody will betray us, as we will keep our eyes open.⁸³

In 1914 the word “machine” had been used by Sologub as the antithesis of man and it was applied solely to the Germans. A year later Sologub provides a new meaning for the term. Man must not be the victim of circumstances, but must show the same reliability and endurance as machines. This concerned not only the war, but also private lives. In addition, the weakening of the institution of the family is no longer seen as a sign of deceitful German influence, but as a symptom of lack of character in the Russians. Lavrentii’s mother has married for the second time and Katia’s father has illegitimate children. This, according to the children, is something which will disappear in the future, when matrimony will be based upon shared ideals and not only upon love and beguiling beauty. Sologub gave the children his support by underlining the same ideals in another short story, “The Beauty and Smallpox” (“Krasavitsa i ospa”).

Lavrik and Katia are representatives of the perfect future generation. For them Russia is a home that they already feel responsible for now. In their utopian dreams there is something of the spirit of Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s classic novel *What Is to Be Done?* (*Chto delat’?*, 1863). In the future, complete equality will reign; there will be neither rich nor poor, neither masters nor servants. Everybody will simplify his life-style and reject his privileges in favour of the collective: “Only the collective can be rich, while everyone must live in joyful, carefree poverty. Let there be splendour, magnificence and gaiety in the community clubs, but coziness, peace, simplicity in our private homes.”⁸⁴ On the threshold of the February revolution, Sologub’s thought was directed at the distant future, far away from a reality, which he no longer understood, but which he still wanted to exert an influence over.

Sologub struck a new, quite unexpected note in a poem from the autumn of 1916. “Seeing the Recruits off” (“Provody rekrutov”) is an honest attempt to see events from the standpoint of the simple people. Seeing young men off to the war is no longer a feast in the name of Russian patriotism, but a tearful

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 171-2 (“Neutomimost”).

84 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

farewell with no hope of reunion. Sacrifices are made, though it is unclear to what purpose. No godly blessing is offered, as the deities of destiny, the Parcae, have lost all interest in the doings of the mortals. The last stanza summarizes the feeling of doom: "There, somewhere in a foreign country,/ far away from familiar places,/ in a foreign coffin/ he will be laid under a friendly cross."⁸⁵ Anatolii Ivanov is right when defining "Seeing the Recruits off" as one of the best Russian poems connected with the First World War.⁸⁶ Sologub reveals here an instantaneous insight in the tragic essence of the war – the senseless loss of young lives and the bottomless sorrow of the mothers.

Valerii Briusov: The Duty to Remember

After Valerii Briusov had made up his mind not to return to Warsaw, the war gradually became a remote subject in his writing. War was after all an "unclean" element in his poetics, an inappropriate topic for poetry. Even so, thoughts of the war haunted him. From having been an abstract, historico-philosophical issue, it had been transformed into an actual battle line somewhere in Poland and Galicia, where Russian soldiers fought and died, and it disturbed the harmony out of which true art was born. Briusov spent the summer of 1915 in the village of Burkovo, not far from Moscow. In the poem "Pastoral Rhymes" ("Derevenskie rifmy") the poet contentedly gazes at a timeless, peaceful pastoral scene, but his peace of mind is shattered by the sounds of passing military trains. The poem portrays a realistic fragment of everyday life, but it is fundamentally concerned with the conflict between art and life, eternity and the present moment.⁸⁷

Another "war poem" by Briusov, "Every Day" ("Kazhdyi den"), was published in the widely-read family journal *Niva* at the end of 1915. The comforts of civilian life, the salons and a life of never-ending pleasure are contrasted with the cold, dangers and death at the front.⁸⁸ Vladimir Maiakovskii used the same juxtaposition in his poem "To You!" ("Vam!"),⁸⁹ but where the futurist was overtly

* "Tam, gde-to v chuzhbine,/ Daleko ot znaemykh mest,/ V chuzhdoi domovine/ On liazhet pod družeskii krest."

85 "Provody rekrutov", *Ogonek* 48 (1916), p. 5. The poem was later called "What a submissiveness in their lament" ("Kakaia pokornost' v ikh plache").

86 A.I. Ivanov, *Pervaia mirovaia voina v russkoi literature 1914-1918* (Tambov, 2005), pp. 43-44.

87 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 11, p. 154 ("Derevenskie rifmy").

88 *Ibid.*, vol. 11, pp. 154-5 ("Kazhdyi den"). First publ. in *Niva. Eshchemesiachnye literaturnye i populiarno-nauchnye prilozheniia* 10 (1915), p. 175.

89 Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 75 ("Vam!").

provocative, Briusov contented himself with a quiet reminder. “Every Day” is a plea to the reader not to forget the soldiers, but to remember them every day in his prayers. “Every Day” had a deep personal significance for Briusov, who had “deserted” the Russian soldiers in Poland and Galicia for his study in Moscow.

Briusov’s dilemma was given a precise formulation in another poem, “Contradictions” (“Protivorechiia”), of December 1915: “I want to forget – to forget is impossible” (“Khochu zabyt’ – zabyt’ nel’zia”).⁹⁰ Even now, six months later, the dissonances of the war perpetually force their way into his thoughts. A return to the world of pure poetry and to a position from which the war would appear to be something peripheral, had turned out to be impossible. As in the earlier “The Feast of War”, the war in “Contradictions” is given a grotesque, frightening shape: “/.../ large-toothed beasts of War angrily/ scour the bloody fields!” (“/.../ po poliam okrovavlenным gnevno/ Ryshchut zubastye zveri Voiny!”).⁹¹ But the war does not only have the shape of a beast, it is also the grieving face of Russia and its unknown future. The abstract notion of war is being merged with its national aspect.

The question of whether the poet should serve eternity and beauty or the historical moment was raised again in “Contradictions”. The title of the poem underlines Briusov’s inner split. The text contains an ongoing dialogue, in which not only the wish to forget about the present, but also doubts concerning the social power of poetry somewhat surprisingly appear as a satanic temptation:

Thought says: “What can the voice
of your poems, hardly audible, do?
Go back to your old strophes’ melodies!”
But, like the clangor of bells,
a mysterious call disturbs me.*⁹²

At the beginning of the war, Briusov had been similarly moved by a “call” (“Posledniaia voina”). At that time, it was enslaved people who were demanding freedom. The voice that sounds in “Contradiction” is weak and difficult to interpret, but the ringing of bells evokes not only the “conscience of Russia”,

90 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 227 (“Protivorechiia: 2. Liubimye melochi”).

91 *Ibid.*, p. 226 (“Protivorechiia: 1. Pesni”).

* “Mysl’ govorit: ‘Tvoikh stikhov/ Chtó golos, ele slyshnyi, mozhet?/ Vernis’ k napevam prezhnikh strof!’/ No, slovno gul kolokolov,/ Prizyv tainstvennyi trevozhit.”

92 *Ibid.*, p. 227 (“Protivorechiia: 2. Liubimye melochi”).

Aleksandr Gertsen and his famous journal *Kolokol* (*The Bell*), but also the Russian legend about the submerged town of Kitezh, whose bells ring to remind people of lost spiritual values. Thoughts of a more direct involvement in the war were maturing in Briusov, but the decisive moment had not yet arrived, and the message had not been formulated.

After his return to Moscow Briusov began to devote most of his time to Armenian culture. In the autumn of 1914 a committee had been established in Moscow to support the Armenians with weapons and propaganda in their struggle against the Turks. At the suggestion of Gor'kii, representatives of the committee approached Briusov, asking him to edit an anthology of classical and modern Armenian poetry in Russian translation. The money raised would be used to help Armenian refugees. Briusov accepted the task with enthusiasm. His love of world literature and his interest in translation were given an outlet, while the job also enabled him to show solidarity with a war-ridden people. His work on "hoary antiquity" was notably also a way of getting away from the present moment and seeking relief for his soul after a winter in Poland ("K Armenii").⁹³

Before the February revolution, Briusov visited the Caucasus twice, meeting writers and public figures not only in Erevan, but also in Baku and Tiflis. For Briusov this was exclusively cultural work. He only mentioned the Turkish policy of ethnic extermination of the Armenians in passing after the February revolution, and he did not choose to visit the battle lines on the Caucasian front. His encounter with Armenia and its neighbours inspired several poems, but in his cycle of poems, "In Armenia" ("V Armenii"), he only deals with the past. Similarly, the talks he gave in Moscow and Petrograd were strictly about Armenian poetry and not about the war.

A rare case of involvement by Briusov in the war effort in the Caucasus was a poetry recital in his honour in March 1916. The takings from the event went to a Caucasian rehabilitation centre for disabled soldiers.⁹⁴ Viacheslav Ivanov had been invited to open the evening. A year earlier he had beseeched Briusov to return from journalism to poetry, but now he praised his colleague for being an "incessant poetic echo of what we are all going through". Ivanov saw this as being in keeping with Briusov's basic traits as a poet, because, while at heart a romantic, he had still always known how to observe reality soberly and to live in the present moment. If poetry was a dialogue between the 'I' and the world, then there had always been more of the world than of the 'I' in the poetry of

93 *Ibid.*, p. 237 ("K Armenii").

94 M.Z., "Vecher Valerii Briusova", *Utro Rossii* 6.3.1916 66.

Briusov. According to Ivanov, this was already enough for Briusov to be denied the right to call himself a symbolist. After praising his colleague as an influential poet, he proceeded to explain why Briusov was not a true symbolist. Briusov was not a mystic, but professed a fatalistic determinism. A feminine submission to fate as the mechanical principle dominating the universe, signified a distrust of man and a renunciation of human freedom. Consequently, it also meant a rejection of God and the possibility of an earthly paradise, the advancement of which Ivanov saw as the main task of symbolist poetry. With its defence of a religious literature, this declaration more clearly revealed Ivanov's standpoint in the symbolist dispute than it established Briusov's place in the symbolist camp.⁹⁵

Konstantin Bal'mont: Betrayed

When Konstantin Bal'mont arrived in Russia at the end of May 1915 he was quick to assure the public of his pro-war attitude. In spite of the unforeseen prolongation of the war he was still in favour of continuing the fighting. The war was of importance not solely for Russia, but for the whole world: "(...) just as before I feel that this gigantic phantom promises a great liberation for Humankind."⁹⁶ The poem "The Night of Nights", written two months earlier, seemed to testify to a change of mood,⁹⁷ a turn towards pacifism, but, as it soon turned out, Bal'mont had not changed his mind on the prime reasons and goals of the war. In September 1915, he published a new sonnet, "Sentenced" ("Prigovorenniy"), which became his main contribution to Russian attempts at explaining the essence and development of modern Germany:

A people of great achievements
forgot itself. Malice erased in it
the line between man and monster.
It poured its intellect into cannon muzzles.

Over half a century its heart came dully to a stop.
It put honour into commercial circulation,
taught a lie, like a song, to its own throat,
and played the spy at every foreign gate.

95 Ivanov, "O tvorchestve Valerii Briusova".

96 Bal'mont, "Narod-khudozhnik".

97 See pp. 200-1.

And the hour struck. Having heaped up frauds,
falsely pleading, "God is my witness!"
it came like a thief to a peaceful country.

Set it on fire. And all the countries trembled.
But while planning to burn up the world's conscience, it
burned up itself in the world forever.*⁹⁸

Bal'mont was adhering to the prevalent interpretation of the German "riddle". In the 1870s Germany had deserted the moral standards of European civilization and had turned to militarism. Instead of developing its own national countenance, it had started to live at the expense of other nations, spying and stealing. When this parasitical inclination reached its apogee in aggression towards Belgium in 1914, the surrounding nations' reaction took the form of a collective conscience. What could also be found in "Sentenced" was a confirmation of Bal'mont's belief that Germany alone was responsible for the war, that the roots of the evil lay in the German national character and that the only way to stop Germany's treacherous expansion was a military victory by the Allies.

After the poem "Sentenced", Bal'mont almost completely abandoned the theme of war for one and a half years. No direct comments on topical events were to be found in his two new volumes of poetry – *The Ash Tree: The Vision of a Tree* (1916), consisting mainly of poems written in Paris, and *Sonnets of the Sun, Honey and Moon* (*Sonety solntsa, meda i lunny*, 1917). In an interview in May 1915 for *Russkoe slovo*, Bal'mont stressed that there was no "personal poetry" at all in *The Ash Tree* and that only "insignificant elements" in the book were influenced by the war.⁹⁹ Even so, poems like "Calls" ("Zovy") and "From the Dungeon" ("Iz podzemel'ia") testify to the inescapable presence of the war, as it dissipates the inner harmony of the persona.¹⁰⁰ In "An Obstinate

* "Vysokii v dostizheniakh narod/ Zabyt seb'ia. Chertu v nem zloba sterla/ Mez' tem, kto chelovek, i kto urod./ Svoi um on vylil v pushechnye zherla.// Pol'sotni let v nem serdtse tupo merlo./ On chest' pustil v torgovyi oborot,/ Kak pesne, lzhi svoe uchil on gorlo./ Lazutchikom u vsekh chuzhikh vorot.// I probil chas. Nagromozdiv obmаны,/ Ssylaia's' lozhno – "Bog, svidetel' mne!"/ Kak vor, on k mirnoi podoshel strane.// Zazheg ee. I drognuli vse strany./ No sovest' mira szhech' zadumav, on/ Tem samym v mire navsegda sozhzhen."

98 K. Bal'mont, "Prigovorennii", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 20.9.1915 15099.

99 "U K.D. Bal'monta". The same claim was repeated in Bal'mont, "[Voina i tvorchestvo]".

100 Bal'mont, *Iasen'*, pp. 154 ("Zovy"), 164-5 ("Iz podzemel'ia").

Person" ("Upriamets") poetic form is given to the conflict between pure poetry and political verse. Bal'mont defended the right to be a "child" and extol what is untimely, even at a moment when only "birds of revenge", that is military planes, are flying and when everybody's mind is filled with "fire and smoke".¹⁰¹ "An Obstinate Person" was singled out by Orest Tsekhnovitser in his book on Russian literature of the First World War as a poem of "defection",¹⁰² but it should be added that the wish to escape the present moment expressed in the poem does not result in an anti-war manifestation, but in a passive submission to events. The conflict is stated but found impossible to resolve.

On 13 February 1916 Bal'mont appeared at a poetry evening at the Polytechnical Museum in Moscow, reading among others his poem about the capture of Erzerum, "Not a bell, the singer of bronze thoughts...". The proceeds from the recital were donated to a fund for a sanatorium in the Caucasus for actors crippled in the war.¹⁰³ On the following day, Bal'mont gave a lecture, this time donating the money to victims of the war via the Central Bureau of the Moscow Magistracy. In general, Bal'mont had a hectic program during the years 1915-1916. From September to December 1915 he had been touring Russia, going all the way down to the Caucasus, and in February he again left Moscow for a long tour, this time appearing in the Ukraine, Siberia and East Asia. In May 1916, he spent a few weeks in Japan.¹⁰⁴

When appearing publicly, Bal'mont chose not to comment on the war, but stuck to his own domain, thereby confirming the primacy of poetry. He took a special interest in Polish and Georgian poetry, using them as mirrors of the respective national characters. In Tiflis and Kutaisi in 1915 he recited parts of his recent translation of Shota Rustaveli's medieval epic *The Knight in a Panther Skin*,¹⁰⁵ and in January 1916 it was read in Moscow by Sumbatov-Iuzhin at an occasion, the proceeds from which went to a hospital maintained by the Georgian Society in Moscow. Bal'mont talked about Rustaveli as a representative of a nationality tragically affected by the war.¹⁰⁶

In 1916 Bal'mont explained his "desertion" from the front of "war poetry". During the first war year he had believed in a rapprochement between Russia and Poland and a common renaissance for the Slavonic peoples. At the

101 *Ibid.*, p. 174 ("Upriamets").

102 Tsekhnovitser, pp. 275-6.

103 "Vecher K.D. Bal'monta", *Utro Rossii* 14.2.1916 45.

104 D.G. Makogonenko, "K.D. Bal'mont: Zhizn' i sud'ba", in K.D. Bal'mont, *Izbrannoe: Stikhotvoreniia. Pervody. Stat'i* (Moscow, 1990), pp. 18-9.

105 Azadovskii, p. 152.

106 "Vecher Rustaveli", *Den'* 15.1.1916 15.

beginning, the war had fulfilled his forecasts, but it soon changed its character and started to disappoint all expectations.¹⁰⁷ What Bal'mont had in mind was naturally the Russian military debacles, which had also led to the loss of Poland. Germany, on the contrary, had in spite of all prophecies preserved its strength, and even after two years of fighting the much longed-for end of the war still seemed far off. Bal'mont did not exercise self-criticism and admit his own blindness, but preferred to blame the disastrous course of events on Russian treachery, "the shady dishonesty in the rear".¹⁰⁸

In December 1916, on the eve of the February revolution, Bal'mont repeated in vague words, fit for a symbolist seer, his misgivings from "The Night of Nights". The war could turn out to be not the solution to humankind's problem, as he had originally thought, but, on the contrary, the beginning of a long dark period of troubles. The vision of a utopian "Holy Spring" was replaced by apocalyptic terror:

When at last the dragon's teeth, wrenched out of the beast's mouth, fall on to an earth, which is already indignant at all the defilement and disgrace, out of them will grow beautiful and frightening monsters that will be overshadowed by even more frightening spectacles of fire, iron, poisonous exhalations, flights through the air, robbery underground and underwater, leading to a new wrath of the Earth and a new destruction of Atlantis.¹⁰⁹

Bal'mont did not reveal whether he meant Germany or European civilization by Atlantis, a perhaps deliberate ambiguity in a moment of despair. This was no longer his war, and therefore it could not be reflected in his poetry any longer: "(...) when my heart is cheated, when my dearest, most cherished ideas are disgraced tenfold and more, I cannot and do not want to speak about the war any longer, and in any case the noble music that is called poetry does not let the word enter it anymore."¹¹⁰ Experience also showed the need for caution. Bal'mont could accept only some ten of the existing corpus of "war poems", while the rest were dismissed as "intolerably bad, senseless, vulgar".¹¹¹ Reality had revealed the difficulties that poets, including himself, faced when dealing with the theme of war.

¹⁰⁷ Bal'mont, "Slovo o Pol'she".

¹⁰⁸ Bal'mont, "[Voina i tvorchestvo]".

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Zinaida Gippius: Waiting for Revolution

Zinaida Gippius and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii could not refrain from gloating their triumph after the Russian defeats of the summer of 1915. Dreams of a Greater Russia had turned out to be as loosely founded as they had thought. The Poland and Galicia that the Russian nationalists had wanted to swallow up were lost. "Where now is your Tsar'grad"? Gippius asked the neo-Slavophiles,¹¹² and Merezhkovskii noted that in August 1914 one of the chauvinists had promised to cut off his own hand if it took more than two months to conquer Berlin. "Where is the cut-off hand?" Merezhkovskii asked venomously.¹¹³ To be sure, Merezhkovskii and Gippius had been devoid of any imperialistic inclinations. During the general rejoicing at the capture of Przemyśl in the spring of 1915, Gippius commented ironically in her diary: "And we have taken towns and fortresses from the Austrians. Now we are establishing autocratic order there."¹¹⁴ Just as she had no wish to see the tsarist regime enlarging its sphere of influence, Slavdom remained an empty phrase for her under present conditions. She received the news about Bulgaria's "betrayal" of Slavonic unity with complete composure.

Gippius later wrote that it was during the winter of 1916 that her and Merezhkovskii's belief in a happy outcome of the war started to waver. It must be said, however, that neither Gippius' published texts nor her secret diary offer any evidence of an initial optimism. The war was a harsh necessity, and Gippius initially had no hopes other than that humankind would learn from its errors and eventually resume its movement along "the Great Path". She wished for an Allied victory over "German barbarity", but refrained from making predictions about the possibility of its realization. As the Russian army was forced to retreat, the concrete defence of Russia's borders and independence emerged as the chief issue of concern. Gippius saw it as closely connected with the question of political power. In her diary she noted with alarm the influence of Grigorii Rasputin and Aleksandr Protopopov, a former patient of a mental hospital, who was now functioning as vice-president of the Duma and later even became Minister of the Interior. Another bad omen was the growing number of war-profiteers.¹¹⁵

At the beginning of the war, Gippius had noted in her diary that it was still too early to discuss openly the conflict between Russian patriotism and tsarist

¹¹² Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 257.

¹¹³ Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, pp. 191-2 ("Zhelezo pod molotom").

¹¹⁴ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 240.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

rule.¹¹⁶ A year later the problem could not be pushed aside any longer, and Gippius stated as an undisputable truth that Russia under the present regime was unable to defeat Germany and thus free itself from the war.¹¹⁷ With a more outspoken radicalism than she had previously displayed, she saw immediate, fundamental political change as the only way of rescuing Russia.¹¹⁸

Soon another fear was added to the German threat, namely the anti-war sentiments of the Russian people. Rejection of war was in itself a genuine Christian response that she herself was familiar with, but under present circumstances “you must not” had to be changed into “you have to”. The problem was that the common people lacked the consciousness that such a choice presupposed. They went off to war with a humility that Gippius found more alarming than moving, as it was a meekness that could easily turn into disobedience.¹¹⁹ She interpreted some minor strikes as the first signs of a coming uprising. But as a spontaneous revolt of the masses could not bring the war to an honorable end, but would only lead to a complete breakdown, it had to be forestalled by a revolution from above.¹²⁰ Orest Tsekhnovitser talks about Gippius’ fear of a popular revolution and labels her position as “reactionary pacifism”.¹²¹ The term is not appropriate, as the target of Gippius’ criticism was not the war, but the inefficient and weak government that had to be overthrown in the name of the war. Gippius put her hope in a palace coup, led by a small, radical group. Political power was to be assumed by a coalition of the Centre and the Left. On their own, the liberals were too conciliatory and the Left too utopian, but together they could form a functioning bloc.¹²²

Without a revolutionary act Russia was lost, but those who could bring about positive changes – the intelligentsia, the liberal politicians and the political émigrés – remained passive. A new, strong Russian regime, could, with a resolute pro-war orientation, together with the Allied blockade, force Germany into peace negotiations. Peace should not be accepted at any price, for a peace treaty on German terms would be as meaningless as a continuation of the war. A harsh peace treaty on Allied terms, on the other hand, would engender national embitterment and feelings of revenge and thus give birth to new armed conflicts. The right formulation had been given by the American

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 244-5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 255, 273.

¹²¹ Tsekhnovitser, p. 264.

¹²² Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, pp. 251-2, 258.

president Woodrow Wilson, “A peace without winners and losers.”¹²³ This was to be Gippius’ slogan during 1917.

Gippius’ revolutionary thoughts were only spelled out in her diary and uttered exclusively in small, reliable circles. An agent was seen patrolling outside the entrance to her home, and when talking by telephone, she sometimes preferred to use Aesopian language. After her main organ, *Golos zhizni*, had been shut down for economic reasons in the summer of 1915, Gippius almost completely ceased to comment on the war publicly. Pre-censorship had been tightened, and newspapers were appearing with blank spaces. Gippius still managed to fool the censorship on at least one occasion. In January 1916, a fairy-tale with a clear-cut revolutionary message, “No Man’s Land” (“Mezhstrannoe”), was published.¹²⁴ Two kingdoms, which have always been at war, decide to put an end to their conflict by fencing off a substantial no-man’s land. A peace emerges, based upon the exclusion of everything foreign, but the solution does not satisfy everyone. A new society springs up in the neutral zone, attracting to it all the best people from the two neighbouring countries. When the time is ripe, the “inbetweeners” knock down the fences and declare a coup. No wars are to be fought anymore, as “We are all kings. There are as many kings as there are people.” It was a vision of how people untouched by nationalism assume power and establish international brotherhood. The fairy-tale represented a conscious compromise between the impossible task of composing fiction about the war and the equally dubious choice of themes unrelated to the current moment. The narrator’s claim to be relating an old fairy-tale could not hide the fact that “No Man’s Land” revealed Gippius’ own standpoint on the war question.

As a model for “war literature”, Gippius offered a well-known poem by the French writer Charles Péguy, “Heureux ceux”, which had been written before the war.¹²⁵ Péguy’s obsession with the notion of honour and his praise for death in a just war differed sharply from the mood of Gippius’ own “war poetry”, but she must have felt attracted by the poem’s sublime religiosity and subdued tone, features which were indeed rare in Russian “war poetry”. Nevertheless, in Gippius’ view, the most appropriate attitude for a writer, as far as the war was concerned, was silence. The substance of modern war, which Gippius defined as “the machine gun, gas and shrapnel”, was in itself unfit for

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 272, 275.

¹²⁴ Zinaida Gippius, “Mezhstrannoe”, *Utro Rossii* 15.1.1916 15. An English translation, “No Man’s Land: A Fairy Tale”, was published the same year in *The Soul of Russia*, pp. 159–66.

¹²⁵ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, pp. 264–5.

poetry. The low standard of “war literature” served as proof of the impossibility of creating art out of spontaneous reactions to contemporary events. By 1916 it seemed as if Gippius’ prayer from “With Love” had been heard, since the war theme had almost completely disappeared from literature, a fact which she noted with satisfaction.¹²⁶

A topical motif that appeared repeatedly in Gippius’ writings, was the figure of the grieving mother. The classic example of pity for soldiers’ mothers in Russian poetry was Nikolai Nekrasov’s “When I Think About the Horrors of War...” (“Vnimaia uzhasam voyny...”, 1856), a poem that Gippius loved and consciously alluded to. Among the Russian symbolists, Bal’mont treated the same motif in his poem “A Mother”, but in his case, it was more a display of traditional patriotism than a testimony to true compassion for a fellow human being. One of Gippius’ short stories, “Rest, heart” (“Serdtshe otdokhni”, 1916), is entirely dedicated to the theme of maternal love.¹²⁷ As her son leaves for the front, the mother of the short story symbolically buries him in the church-yard. She puts a cross on his grave with 1 August 1914 as the date of his death. This weird act is an expression of a psychological defence mechanism; in order to survive the possible death of her son, the mother prepares herself mentally through self-inflicted sorrow. His return from the war would subsequently be equal to a miracle, a resurrection from the dead. The thought behind “Rest, heart” was original, but Gippius failed to turn it into art.

Gippius touched upon the same motif repeatedly in her diary. “In a cowardly fashion I fear the mothers, who are constantly waiting for news about ‘the fallen’”, she wrote in September 1914.¹²⁸ Two years later she repeated her thought: “A mother whose son has been killed. It is impossible to look at her. All discussion, all thought falls silent before her.”¹²⁹ The poem “Today on the Earth” (“Segodnia na zemle”, 1916) expresses the same feeling of shame in face of genuine sorrow. The soldier’s mother is the ultimate test for all theories and works of art concerning the war. The pity felt for mothers could not alter Gippius’ acceptance of the war, but the mothers represent the reality that defeats

126 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 142 (“Togda i opiat”). A.I. Ivanov (*Pervaia mirovaia voina v russkoi literature 1914-1918* / Tambov, 2005/, pp. 41-2) sees the fourth stanza of the poem with its picture of writers returning to write “in the mist of their former mirages” (“v tumane prezhykh marev”) as an accusation implicitly directed against her fellow Symbolists, who by now did their best to forget the war.

127 Zinaida Gippius, “Serdtshe otdokhni”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 10.4.1916 15493.

128 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 238.

129 *Ibid.*, p. 264.

the word. Ultimately, “Today on the Earth” marks the end of poetry, the point at which silence begins.¹³⁰

Compulsory silence did not totally defeat Gippius’ poetic impulses in connection with the World War. In 1915 she composed a strong anti-war poem, the often quoted “Without Justification” (“Bez opravdaniia”, 1915):

No, I shall never be reconciled,
my curses are sure.
I won’t forgive, I won’t throw myself
into an iron embrace.

Like all, I shall go, die, kill,
like all, destroy myself,
but I won’t stain my soul
with justification.

To the last hour, in darkness, in fire,
let my heart never forget:
there is no justification for war!
And there never will be.

And if this is God’s palm
– this bloody road,
my spirit will go to battle with Him, too,
rising up even against God.*¹³¹

“Without Justification” was initially dedicated to Maksim Gor’kii, whose rejection of the war had briefly brought him close to Gippius and Merezhkovskii. The religious problem raised in the poem was, however, completely alien to Gor’kii. The thought of a rebellion against an unrighteous God was striking, but it is to be seen rather as a protest against the attempts of writers like Sologub and Ivanov to enrol God on Russia’s side in the war, than as an expres-

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144 (“Segodnia na zemle”).

* “Net, nikogda ne primirius’/ Verny moi proklat’ia./ Ia ne proshchu, ia ne sorvus’/ V zheleznye ob’iat’ia.// Kak vse, poidu, umru, ub’iu,/ Kak vse – sebia razrushu,/ No opravdaniem – svoiu/ Ne zapiatniuiu dushu.// V poslednii chas, vo t’me, v ogne,/ Pust’ serdtse ne zabudet:/ Net opravdaniia voine!/ I nikogda ne budet.// I esli eto Bozh’ia dlan’ –/ Krovavaia doroga, –/ Moi dukh poidet i s Nim na bran’/ Vosstanet i na Boga.”

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143 (“Bez opravdaniia”).

sion of religious doubt. The God of War was the God of the Old Testament and not the Christian God, as Gippius had already stated in “Adonai”. The promise never to justify war emerges strongly in “Without Justification”, but it has to be seen in the context of Gippius’ general attitude. The war ought not be justified, but it has to be accepted. It is a simultaneous “yes” and “no” which is expressed in the poem. The essential thing was not to defile “the word”. To participate in the war was forgivable, but to talk about it in a positive vein was not.

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii: Waiting for the Apocalypse

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii’s attitude to the war did not go through any significant changes in 1915.¹³² Moments of optimism mingled with moments of despair. Against the background of all-embracing violence and national hatred, the reading of Lev Tolstoi’s diary with its lofty Christian reflections awoke depressing thoughts about the ineffectiveness of all cultural work. The war seemed to represent the definitive victory of matter over spirit.¹³³

During the first year of the war Merezhkovskii had totally refrained from commenting on contemporary events in fictional form. This response could not necessarily have been predicted. In spite of his criticism of populist didacticism, Merezhkovskii’s own artistic creed was “art for a purpose”.¹³⁴ Literature was a vehicle for propagating ideas, and he usually turned to fiction when he wished to repeat, with greater emphasis and for a wider audience, thoughts that he had already expressed in some other form.¹³⁵ Merezhkovskii did have a message concerning the war, but respect for the individual tragedies of the war and doubt about the power of the word made him avoid “war fiction”. The only exception appears to be a short poem of December 1915:

Let the devil rejoice
as never before;
ancient chaos is raging
and hostility is blazing.

¹³² Bedford (p. 143), on the contrary, claims that Merezhkovskii, after an initial “wait-and-see attitude”, was later forced to justify the war and to look for features in it which did not really exist. However, both these tendencies were already present in the autumn of 1914.

¹³³ Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, pp. 39 (“Poddenshchik Khristov”), 207-9 (“Dukha ne ugashaite”).

¹³⁴ Rosenthal, pp. 54, 170.

¹³⁵ Bedford, pp. 120-1.

Let love grow cold,
 let hearts turn to stone;
 whoever still dares to love
 – may he love to the end.*¹³⁶

“Let the devil rejoice...” (“Pust’ zhe d’iavol likuet...”) is a timeless poem, which presents the war as a spiritual struggle. The satanic force is the primitive side of man, the ancient barbarity, that culture has not been able to defeat. The destructive powers behind the war accumulate in striking lines to be opposed finally by love alone. Like hatred, love is not explicitly linked to any nation. The tone of the poem is far from exultant, but it derives its strength from a sense of ethical obligation, beyond all pragmatic considerations. What Merezhkovskii actually advocated was to wage war while inspired by love for the future universal humankind.

The denunciation of nationalism had the same urgency as before for Merezhkovskii. The military debacles only strengthened his hope for a defeat of absolute nationalism.¹³⁷ However, in the war everyone was killing others and endangering his own life in the name of national ideas, while no-one was fighting for universal humankind.

For Merezhkovskii the intelligentsia was the true representative of the Russian national spirit. “To doubt the Russian intelligentsia, the conscience of the Russian people, is to doubt the people itself”, he reminded himself at the outbreak of the war.¹³⁸ When the positive image of the intelligentsia was shattered by recurrent manifestations of chauvinism and the manifest lack of an all-human consciousness, a tendency to idealize the common people grew stronger instead. Merezhkovskii was deeply disturbed by the negative image of the Russian soldier given in a recent English book, *Russia and the World* (1915). The author, Stephen Graham, portrayed the Russian as a barbarian, who respected only physical strength and who out of his hatred for the enemy was not even willing to grant him a Christian funeral.¹³⁹ Provoked by Graham’s claims, Merezhkovskii presented an idealized, almost Slavophile image of the Russian people with all the ensuing contradictions. Merezhkovskii

* “Pust’ zhe d’iavol likuet,/ Kak eshche nikogda;/ Drevnii khaos bushuet/ I pylaet vrazhda;/ Pust’ liubov’ kholodeet,/ Kameneiut serdtsa, –/ Kto liubit’ eshche smee,/ Tot liubi do kontsa.”

¹³⁶ D. Merezhkovskii, “Pust’ zhe d’iavol likuet...”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 25.12.1915 15290.

¹³⁷ Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 191 (“Zhelezo pod molotom”).

¹³⁸ Merezhkovskii, “Mysli o voine”.

¹³⁹ Stephen Graham, *Russia and the World* (London, 1915), p. 105.

rejected Graham's image as false. Not only was the Russian soldier brave, but he also showed a noble, deeply human attitude towards the defeated enemy, a fact which revealed that even during the war he still showed that he had been created in the image of God.¹⁴⁰ A profound Russian – and Slavonic – national trait was a deep aversion for all forms of violence, including war.¹⁴¹ Patriotism was not linked to imperialism and militarism, but the Russians, in Merezhkovskii's experience, were in themselves devoid of imperialistic feelings. All possible traces of imperialism were of German origin.¹⁴² While the intelligentsia indulged in national self-glorification, the distinctive feature of the Russian people at large was universality. Russians possessed an ability to "reincarnate", to shift from their own national identity into other, foreign ones:

This miracle of transfiguration (*perevoploshchenie*), the miracle of universalism, is chiefly a Russian miracle, a special gift from God, great and terrifying. One could say that the national calling of Russia lies in the overcoming of the notion of nationality and the attainment of all-humanity.¹⁴³

Merezhkovskii loved to repeat Dostoevskii's words, "To be Russian means to be an all-human man (*vsechelovek*)". From his key word "universalism", he formed the term "universalist" (*vsemirnik*). For a "universalist" the earth belonged only to God. Universalism was an apocalyptic feeling, and as uncompromising seekers after truth, Russians were more conscious than any other people of the approaching end of world history, the universal unification of man and the coming of the Kingdom of God.¹⁴⁴ As universalism was the highest ideal of humanity and the basis of the coming Third Testament, it followed logically that the Russians were a Chosen People. This view helps explain Merezhkovskii's fierce criticism of nationalistic tendencies among the Russian intelligentsia. The very stratum of the population that should lead the nation intellectually and morally had rejected the holiest trait of the people and thus failed in its task to bring the future nearer. The Russian intelligentsia's betrayal was thus

140 D. Merezhkovskii, "Angliiskaia kniga o Rossii", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 5.9.1915 15069; Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 177 ("Voina i religii").

141 Merezhkovskii, "Est' Rossiia".

142 *Ibid.*

143 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 144 ("V.S. Solov'ev"). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 15.11.1915 15211.

144 *Ibid.*, pp. 57 ("Raspiaty narod"), 161-3 ("Chaadaev").

not only a national, but also a universal tragedy, and, furthermore, presented a serious threat to Merezhkovskii's schemes.

It might be asked whether Merezhkovskii himself did not in fact come close to absolute nationalism, or the worst possible offense against the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit. After severely criticizing the neo-Slavophiles, he himself now appeared to have fallen into the trap of claiming that both modesty and greatness were prominent national virtues. There was, however, a decisive difference, as Merezhkovskii praised the Russian people within a universal context. Russian spiritual greatness did not exclude other nations, and it did not represent a danger, but rather a blessing for the rest of the world, as it stood in the service of universalism. Like all other nations, Russia would ultimately become an integral part of universal humanity. Furthermore, just like Ivanov's concept of *sobornost'*, universalism was only a spiritual potential that had not yet taken appropriate external forms. Russia had to undergo great changes, and instead of waiting passively for national resurrection and the coming universal feast, Russians had to make themselves worthy. Prior to the war, little attention had been given to material life, but Russia could not only cultivate its spiritual life, as the condition of the national body was of equal importance. Germany represented the extreme opposite and could thus serve as a warning. It had only cared for the "bread" and had indeed reached a high material level, but, as the spirit had been neglected, culture eventually no longer bred life but death.¹⁴⁵ There was not the same total split between the spirit and the flesh in Russia, and Merezhkovskii therefore looked to the future with confidence. He found it a Slavophile error to see submissive humility as the main Russian trait, and proposed instead love for freedom and a strong vitality. Everywhere one could find, if not impressive achievements, then at least a thirst for knowledge, technology and culture. As a result of the war, an increased interest in both creative work and religion would emerge.¹⁴⁶

Despite the difficult situation at the front, Merezhkovskii was not prepared to accept peace. On the contrary, he now began to demand a continuation of the war more actively than before. In September 1915, he repeated his message from the Easter issue of *Russkoe slovo* that there could be no peace without a victory for the Allied Powers. He who asked for peace without victory was a traitor not only to his own people, but to whole of humankind. Merezhkovskii preferred to see the world perish than to see it transformed into "Prussian barracks", a German Social Democratic republic – one of the potential forms

¹⁴⁵ Merezhkovskii, "Voskresnet: Iz dnevnika".

¹⁴⁶ Merezhkovskii, "Angliiskaia kniga o Rossii".

of the kingdom of the Beast. One had to fight to the finish, remembering that love for humankind would eventually defeat nationalism.¹⁴⁷

Merezhkovskii again turned to Vladimir Solov'ev, taking him as an example of how man should relate to war. Without justifying the war, one should humble oneself and accept it alongside one's fellows. Merezhkovskii felt sure that Solov'ev would have approved of this particular war: "He would have said, just as we are saying, it is a horrible, accursed war, but it still has to be waged to the end."¹⁴⁸ This method of reasoning, also familiar from Gippius, might seem to be intellectually dishonest, but for Merezhkovskii the paradoxical combination of acceptance and denial was in fact central to Christianity. He simultaneously cursed the war as a violation of universalism and blessed it as a decisive step towards the unification of humankind. The war was a punishment that brought hope. The only way to salvation, not only for Germany, but for the whole of humankind, was crucifixion and a subsequent resurrection and transfiguration: "The pains of the great war are the pangs of a great birth – humanity is now being born. And if a living child is being born, and not a dead foetus, then mankind will become 'Godmanhood.'¹⁴⁹ The war could not be ended until the national collectives had formed religious bonds among themselves and until Godmanhood, the Church, had been established.¹⁵⁰ The end of the war was to signify the end of all wars and the beginning of eternal peace.¹⁵¹

The great hopes that Merezhkovskii had started to attach to the war were bound to end in disillusion. According to Gippius, by 1916 Merezhkovskii's interest shifted from the war to thoughts of revolution. The choice was between an uprising from below, leading to total anarchy, and a revolution from above, brought about by a religiously inspired elite. The new leaders of Russia were to be found in the ranks of the Socialist Revolutionaries. The Marxists had compromised themselves in the 1905 revolution, while the program of the Constitutional Democrats was too narrowly egoistic. The Socialist Revolutionary Party was well-organized and was the only political group that appeared to have organic bonds with the people.¹⁵²

147 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 195 ("Zhelezo pod molotom").

148 *Ibid.*, p. 145 ("V.S. Solov'ev").

149 *Ibid.*, p. 59 ("Raspiatyti narod").

150 [Dmitrii Merezhkovskii], "Religioznaia lichnost' i obshchestvennost'", *Birzhevyi vedomosti* 14.3.1916 15440.

151 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevniki*, p. 145 ("V.S. Solov'ev").

152 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 160.

Very little of this can actually be found in Merezhkovskii's writings, while the views are in fact strikingly reminiscent of Gippius' own analysis of the situation. What is evident, though, is how Merezhkovskii's image of a united Russia was gradually and irretrievably shattered. The 1914 Christmas issue of *Birzhevye vedomosti* promised an essay by him entitled "Two Russias" ("Dve Rossii").¹⁵³ The publication of the article was forbidden at the last moment, and the meaning of its title therefore remained unexplained. In the volume *Was and Will Be* (*Bylo i budet*, 1915) there is an essay about Lev Tolstoi with the same title, in which the "two Russias" are the present and the future Russia.¹⁵⁴ This could be the article that was forbidden in 1914, but Merezhkovskii might also have been referring to other splits, like the one between the intelligentsia and the people, or even between the regime and the people.¹⁵⁵ Instead of a united Russia waging war, in 1916 there were two Russias and two separate wars, and as long as this breach existed, Russia could not be victorious. Whether the split could be bridged through an agreement, or whether one of the two Russias had to succumb, Merezhkovskii left unsaid, but his animosity towards autocracy was already well-documented.

In November 1914 Merezhkovskii had declared that Russia had to undergo a rebirth through the war.¹⁵⁶ The change and renewal could not be achieved without Christ, but they had to be prepared by the exertion of human will.¹⁵⁷ Another necessary condition was military victory over Germany. "Only a free Russia will win; only a victorious [Russia, BH] will be free", Merezhkovskii wrote in 1915.¹⁵⁸ Freedom and victory had to be achieved simultaneously, otherwise victory would only strengthen the autocracy. How far Merezhkovskii was prepared to go in his revolutionary zeal is an open question. He did not participate in the planning of a palace coup, nor does Gippius reveal in her diary whether he even supported the idea. At a critical moment, the Merezhkovskiis again left the Russian capital and in December travelled to Kislovodsk, this time for two months.

¹⁵³ "Dve Rossii", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 25.12.1914 14575.

¹⁵⁴ Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, pp. 27-43 ("Dve Rossii").

¹⁵⁵ Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, pp. 192 ("Zhelezo pod molotom"), 208-9 ("Dukha ne ugashaite").

¹⁵⁶ Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, "Voina i religiia", *Russkoe slovo* 30.11.1914 276. In the book version (*Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 178) of the article, the apocalyptically coloured word "rebirth" (*vozrozhdenie*) was changed to the more cautious "renewal" (*obnovlenie*).

¹⁵⁷ Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennyi dnevnik*, p. 36 ("Bol'naia krasavitsa").

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192 ("Zhelezo pod molotom").

The Merezhkovskiis greeted the year 1917 in a pessimistic mood. The war provided no inspiration, but was nearer the regression that they had feared in 1914. A coup had not materialized, and now time was running short for creative forces to save Russia. "If we don't do anything, 'something' will happen by itself. And its face is dark", Gippius noted in her diary.¹⁵⁹

Andrei Belyi: The Revolt of the Machines

In the spring and summer of 1916 Andrei Belyi published a series of articles in *Birzhevyie vedomosti*.¹⁶⁰ The writing process itself had an important therapeutic function for him. Not only did it help him to overcome the mental crisis that anthroposophy and the war had plunged him into, but it also liberated his pent-up creative forces. At this time he started to rewrite *Petersburg* and to work on a new novel, *Kotik Letaev*, as well as a book on Steiner and Goethe. Belyi wrote to Blok that his active return to literature, after a prolonged period of crisis, felt like a resurrection from the dead.¹⁶¹ As Belyi was apt to identify his own fate with the fate of Russia, this change of mood from sterility and crisis to creativity was bound sooner or later to be reflected on a grander scale.

Belyi called his *Birzhevyie vedomosti* articles a diary of his thoughts,¹⁶² and readers would indeed have looked in vain for information about external events in Dornach or even for comments on topical issues. It was general questions promoted by the war that Belyi raised, with the tacit aim of clarifying his own position.¹⁶³ His discourse was naturally affected by the censorship. While it is true that Belyi's publications do not show any signs of external interference,¹⁶⁴ his observation that many contemporary publicists were interesting

159 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 270.

160 Belyi's articles from *Birzhevyie vedomosti* were later published in *Na perevale: I. Krizis zhizni* and *Na perevale: II. Krizis mysli* (1918), but in a partly rewritten and reorganized form.

161 *Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi*, p. 331 (letter to Blok, June 1916).

162 Belyi, *Na perevale I: Krizis zhizni* (Petersburg, 1918), p. 5 ("Vmesto predisloviia").

163 For an outline of the content of Belyi's articles in *Birzhevyie vedomosti*, see E.V. Glukhova and D.O. Torshilov, "Andrei Belyi v Pervuiu mirovuiu voinu", in *Politika i poetika: Russkaia literatura v istoriko-kul'turnom kontekste Pervoi mirovoi voiny. Publikatsiia, issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow, 2014), pp. 165-173.

164 Belyi (*Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, p. 103) claimed that his possibilities to publish in Russia were severely restricted after Frankfurter Zeitung had republished one of his articles.

not only for what they said, but also for what they left unsaid, partly applied to Belyi himself.¹⁶⁵ The sentence, "In Switzerland the war is discussed; and at times in an interesting fashion",¹⁶⁶ was the closest Belyi came to informing his Russian audience about the diversity of opinions voiced in the main neutral country. Long after the war he claimed that he had been acquainted with the Zimmerwald and Kienthal manifestos while still in Switzerland and that he had sympathized with several of their theses.¹⁶⁷ However, no signs of this can be detected in the articles. They give the impression that Belyi did not subscribe to the idea of the war as imperialist, or seek its solution in the united forces of the European working-class and the ultimate establishment of socialism. It is not a question of what could and could not be said, or what could only be hinted at, or even left out, since, when analysing the war, Belyi was thinking in completely different categories from his socialist contemporaries.

Only the ambition to consider the war from a higher standpoint than the national was in the spirit of Zimmerwald-Kienthal. The complete lack not only of nationalism, but also of patriotism in the *Birzhevye vedomosti* articles can partly be explained by Belyi's external situation in Switzerland and the free access he enjoyed to information. Rudolf Steiner had drawn his attention to the crucial role of the press and journalists in the war. Allied war propaganda clearly did not have the desired effect, when contradicted by the newspapers of the Central Powers, and seen from the elevation of Dornach the artificiality of the campaigns of nationalistic hatred and the falseness of the stereotyped portrayals of each side's own soldiers and their enemies were obvious.¹⁶⁸ Belyi claimed that he already saw through the "falsity and blindness of cheap patriotism" in early 1915,¹⁶⁹ but in any event, he did not show this openly until 1916.

In Belyi's eyes, contrary to the opinion of the majority of the symbolists, the war did not accentuate differences between the belligerent nations. What it did was to reveal the hollowness of all prevailing notions about the psychological characteristics of the nationalities involved. No collective hero or villain could be found in the war. Against this background Russian attempts to apply the dichotomy of East and West to the World War looked like an anachronism. Belyi was prepared to dismiss the whole concept as a "myth", in

¹⁶⁵ Belyi, "Sovremennye nemtsy".

¹⁶⁶ Belyi, "Gremiashchaia tishina".

¹⁶⁷ Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, p. 102.

¹⁶⁸ Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere*, pp. 73-4, 237.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

the sense of a fabrication,¹⁷⁰ even if it had been the main oppositional pair in his own thinking.¹⁷¹ This allowed him to turn against the neo-Slavophiles, ridiculing them by parodying their way of reasoning: "The issue is of equal importance everywhere – in the East and in the West: in Russia, in China, in Europe, in America, on the Sandwich Islands, among the Buryats... Who are "we" – Chukchis, Buryats, Germans, Russians, Little Russians (Ukrainians, ВН), Lithuanians or – human beings? And whom should we become: inhabitants of a province, a country, a continent, or inhabitants of the universe, participants in cosmic existence, equal citizens of all planets and all suns."¹⁷² The tone was jocular, but the message serious. To define oneself in strictly national terms was to miss the vision of an undivided humankind, a worldwide brotherhood. Belyi could easily have found Russian examples of Germanophobia, but he chose, perhaps for tactical reasons, to concentrate on a French book, *Les Origines mystiques de la science "allemande"* (1913), by René Lote. The great names of German culture were branded by Lote as barbarians, pathological mystics and Pan-Germanists. For Belyi this attitude represented genuine barbarity. German soldiers had been accused of destroying Reims Cathedral, but writers like Lote were guilty of an even bigger crime, namely the destruction of a common European "cathedral of thought".¹⁷³

Belyi's refusal to join the anti-German front did not come as a surprise. "Everything that I love in the West is inescapably somehow linked with Germany", he had admitted in an autobiographical sketch written shortly before the war, giving a long list of adored names in German literature, music, art, philosophy, science and mysticism.¹⁷⁴ Like Blok, he felt no kinship or even sympathy for France and England, and he even tried to present his case as symbolic of mutual national estrangement, warning the Russians against expecting any real understanding from the Allies. To denigrate German culture not only meant denying one's own roots, since so much in Russian thought was based on German philosophy, mysticism and romanticism, but it also revealed a blindness as to who was Russia's closest spiritual ally. For the Frenchman René Lote, Tolstoi, Dostoevskii and Solov'ev were barbarians to the same degree as Wagner and Nietzsche, while even during the war there was a genuine interest

170 Andrei Belyi, "Vostok ili Zapad?", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 6.7.1916 15661.

171 Pesonen, pp. 71 ff.

172 Belyi, "Vostok ili Zapad".

173 Andrei Belyi, "Priroda", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 7.4.1916 15488.

174 Andrei Belyi, "Avtobiograficheskaia spravka", in *Russkaia literatura XX veka: 1890-1910*, vol. III, part 2, book 7 (Moscow, [1916]), p. 10.

and respect for Russian culture in Germany.¹⁷⁵ Belyi's appeal for greater and less biased interest in German culture was brave and highly inopportune. In his polemical ardour, he was guilty of simplifications about Russia's allies, but what he had to say about the unshaken interest in Russian culture in wartime Germany was thought-provoking, as the corresponding Russian attitude had been one of denial and rejection, based upon the idea of a total war and a totalitarian German identity.

At this point Belyi's real heroes were the non-belligerent citizens of Switzerland. For him they personified the very best of European civilization, as they had not been led astray by narrow-minded nationalism. The solidarity across national boundaries that Belyi himself had witnessed made a deep impression. The population of Basel canton was related by blood to the Germans, but it still showed considerable tact towards Russians living in that area. Money was donated to care for the victims of the war, including those in Russia. Belyi's conclusion was that "culture's all-human countenance", formed in the tradition of lofty humanism, was sharply distinguishable even amidst the war. The West that he had come to know in Switzerland was not a "grave", as the Slavophiles had thought, but a world which was very much alive.¹⁷⁶ The true European had not died.¹⁷⁷

For Belyi the central conflict of the war was not that between individuals, states, or national principles confronting each other. The war was a symptom of a crisis that had long been developing in Europe. The early Renaissance, "the Epoch of great Humanism", as Belyi called it, represented the peak of man's spiritual development. What followed was a process of degeneration. Man shrank spiritually, while the material body of life became morbidly enlarged. By the 20th century developments had reached the point where the ideology of material culture was victorious throughout Europe. Humanism had been killed by mechanism.¹⁷⁸ Technical progress had become a threat to European culture, as man had lost control over his own creations, and demonic forces had taken possession of machines, turning them against their creators.¹⁷⁹ The war was thus a revolt of matter through its body, the machine, against man.¹⁸⁰

175 Belyi, "Sovremennye nemtsy"; Andrei Belyi, "Petrograd i Moskva v osveshchenii pressy nemetskoi Shveitsarii", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 23.8.1916 15757.

176 *Ibid.* This benevolent attitude towards the Swiss nation was disregarded by Soviet literary critics in their attempts to present Belyi exclusively as a fierce critic of the European bourgeoisie.

177 Belyi, "Gorizont soznaniia".

178 Andrei Belyi, "Krizis zhizni", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 30.3.1916 15472.

179 Belyi, "Gorizont soznaniia".

180 Belyi, "Gremiashchaia tishina".

The Russian neo-Slavophiles were thinking on similar lines, but the decisive difference was that Belyi attributed the victory of materialism and a mechanistic world-view, the spirit of a Western Antichrist, to all nations alike.

Belyi defined this fateful course as partly an epistemological problem. The dichotomy of consciousness and feeling had long appeared to him to be one of the main conflicts in modern man; partly under the influence of Steiner, he found a fatal split between the intuitive and rational responses to the world.¹⁸¹ Knowledge was gained through understanding and not through intuition. The Renaissance had signified a "yearning for the concrete object" and taught man to love phenomena as such. But a rebellion had followed, in which the unity between perception and thought, between phenomena and ideas was lost. "Scientific" phenomenalism and scepticism grew in strength, with the result that the concrete idea of the concrete object was turned into emblems and the concrete world into abstractions. "The knowledge of the heart", feeling, was substituted by the workings of the brain and a trust in abstract reasoning and empirical sciences. Thought became abstraction, and abstraction grew into materialism.¹⁸² In this sense the war was a manifestation of the general crisis in human consciousness that Belyi had been examining in his works from the early 1910s. Ledianoi's megalomania in *Notes of an Eccentric*, expressed in the sentence, "'I am the war'",¹⁸³ was not just a reflection of the narrator's mental disturbance; it was also "the illness of the century".¹⁸⁴ The clashes and contradictions within man in general had assumed visible form in the war.

The crisis of consciousness was connected with the crisis of European culture. Culture, originally based upon an "ideal-concrete world", had been given a material body and thus become corrupted.¹⁸⁵ The basis of modern material culture was no longer nature, but technology. In this connection Belyi was prepared to attribute to the war a positive, purifying function, as it demolished what he called "tramway and coffee-house culture".¹⁸⁶ He felt deep satisfaction at the sight of deserted hotels and cafes in the Swiss spas in the autumn of 1915. The "cakewalk life" of the "white-trousers", with their light-hearted pleasure-seeking, flirtation, and fashionable dances, was odious and deserved to be swept away by the Flood.¹⁸⁷

181 Elsworth, *Andrei Belyi: A Critical Study of the Novels*, p. 10.

182 Belyi, "Gremiashchaia tishina"; Belyi, "Krizis zhizni".

183 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. II, p. 114.

184 *Ibid.*, p. 236 ("Posleslovie").

185 Belyi, "Krizis zhizni".

186 Andrei Belyi, "Mertvye goroda", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 17.8.1916 15745.

187 *Ibid.*

Modern culture was not only the product of the West's "diseases", that is rationalism and materialism, but also an expression of the Eastern Antichrist, the Pan-Mongolism that Vladimir Solov'ev had warned of, and of a "Negro revolt" against the Aryans.¹⁸⁸ Statements like these, concrete as they sound, should not be given a literal interpretation. Pan-Mongolism was a symbol for the Asiatic, formless and chaotic elements, which had found expression in the Russo-Japanese war and the Russian revolutionary movement and which was now also flooding the consciousness of man.¹⁸⁹ Belyi's recipe – "let us be firmly... Aryans" – therefore reads as an invitation to overcome the split within man's "ego" and defeat the blind anarchic forces that were threatening civilization as much as too great a trust in pure reason.

Belyi later claimed that he had tried to smuggle "at least one percent antimilitarism" into his articles in *Birzhevyye vedomosti*.¹⁹⁰ His estrangement from the war and his position above national barriers are indeed discernible, but the solution he offered was neither pacifist nor defeatist. Belyi located the causes of the war at such a deep and abstract layer that not even an immediate conclusion of peace would have appeared to be a remedy. As the early poem "War" had demonstrated, the war was primarily a subjective drama, which everyone had first to resolve in his own consciousness.¹⁹¹ The main task was therefore to find what was truly human within oneself, and in this way return to the sources of genuine humanism. Time and time again Belyi repeated, just as he had done before the war, "Know thyself!", quoting in fact not only Socrates, but also Rudolf Steiner and his mystery play *Die Pforte der Einweihung* (1910). The belief that an examination of one's own ego would lead to an understanding of the essence of the world and that a spiritual transfiguration of man would ultimately transform human society was as much in the spirit of Steiner's anthroposophy as in that of symbolism. Science was to be based upon occultism and – as in anthroposophy – religion upon knowledge.¹⁹²

The disclosure of the true essence of the human ego was to result in a break with the contemplative attitude to the world and in the activation of will power, a victory over another fateful contradiction in modern man. True cognition, that is the assertion of the value of intuitive knowledge, would re-

188 Orlov, "Istoriia odnoi 'druzhby-vrazhdy'", p. 11; Belyi, "Mertvye goroda".

189 Belyi, *Vospominaniia o A.A. Bloke*, p. 740.

190 Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, p. 103.

191 Belyi, "[Voina i tvorchestvo]".

192 Victor B. Fedjuschin, *Russland's Sehnsucht nach Spiritualität: Theosophie, Anthroposophie und die Russen. Eine geistige Wanderschaft* (Schaffhausen, 1988), pp. 238-9.

store the unity of thought and nature.¹⁹³ Human consciousness would start actively to oppose the mechanization of life.¹⁹⁴ The true victory in the war would accordingly be a “victory of the spirit over the abnormally developed material flesh of culture”.¹⁹⁵ The road towards this goal was long and difficult. Belyi again used the symbols of crucifixion and resurrection, now in a broader context than previously. The war was leading man to Golgotha and like Christ he had to accept his crucifixion, but beyond the darkness a new era was going to dawn.¹⁹⁶

By Russian military law, all young men who had reached the age of twenty the previous year were called up for military service. In wartime the call-up could also be extended to include lower age groups. Exceptions did exist, one of them concerning families with only one son, as these young men were only called into the reserve as militiamen. However, Russia's considerable losses during the first year of the war led to changes in the military law. A premature conscription was organized in May-June 1915, and in the autumn a new law concerning the militiamen was passed.

As an only child Belyi had been excluded from military service, but now it was obvious that in spite of his age – 34 years – he, too, would most probably have to join the army. In the spring of 1916 Belyi already knew that it was only a matter of months before he would be called up for military service.¹⁹⁷ In the summer he received a summons to return to his hometown of Moscow in order to clarify his family situation for the military authorities.¹⁹⁸ *En clair* this meant that he would have to join the army. Leonid Ledianoi in *Notes of an Eccentric* undergoes the same fate, and in a pacifistic vein he complains that he is doomed to be thrown “like a small grain of corn” into “the insatiable threshing-machine of the war”.¹⁹⁹ The poem “A.M. Potstvo” (“Ia slyshal te medlitel'nye zovy...”) of July 1916 also gives voice to fear at the thought of his approaching call-up, and just like in “War”, a fragmented form reflects a

193 Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, p. 44.

194 Belyi, “Krizis zhizni”.

195 Belyi, “Sovremennye nemtsy”.

196 Belyi, “Vostok ili Zapad?” It is not entirely right to say that Belyi interpreted the World War as Russia's crucifixion and the revolution as its resurrection (Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, p. 46), since up to the October revolution he was mainly concerned with the situation of humankind.

197 Belyi, “Gorizont soznaniia”.

198 Andrei Belyi, *Problemy tvorchestva: Stat'i. Vospominaniia. Publikatsiia* (Moscow, 1988), p. 542 (M.K. Morozova, “Andrei Belyi”).

199 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. I, p. 11.

disoriented mind. The persona of the poem tries to gather his strength so that he will be able to enter “the thunder, the swarms of grenades” (“v groma, v roi granat”).²⁰⁰ On the other hand, Belyi’s own behavior does not reveal any hesitation or anxiety at the thought that he was being summoned to Russia to become, as Ledianoi puts it bluntly, “a carcass”.²⁰¹ Without trying to avoid military service, something which would have been possible, he immediately started to prepare for the trip home.

As a matter of fact, Belyi was rather pleased at the thought of leaving Dornach. He had not lost faith in Steiner, but everyday life in the “Ark” had become stressful. In a letter to Blok, Belyi gave a very gloomy picture of life in the colony. He described the two years of war as “morally terrible, unbearable, stifling, interminable (...)”.²⁰² He had been hated because he was a Russian and envied and slandered because he had been so close to Steiner. The other anthroposophists were “occult spinsters”, who thought of him as a madman, while in fact they themselves were half crazy. The tone was even more pathetic in a letter to Ivanov-Razumnik: “My voice is the voice of a sane person in a ‘lunatic asylum’; this voice is simply the hands of a defenceless child, stretched out towards the faraway mother Russia.”²⁰³ The Soviet critic Vladimir Orlov claims that Belyi is giving here a true picture of life in Dornach,²⁰⁴ while four years later he idealized it in *Notes of an Eccentric*. In his book on Rudolf Steiner, dated 1929, Belyi also only talks about the complete harmony that prevailed in the circle around Steiner.²⁰⁵ Belyi is evidently not a trustworthy witness, as his frame of mind in the period 1914-1915 must have put all social relations to a hard test. Whatever he thought about the circle around Steiner, this did not have any influence on his totally positive picture of the Master himself and anthroposophy in general.²⁰⁶ Much of what he said in the letters he sent to Russia can also be explained as a wish to show his friends that he was able to maintain critical distance to the anthroposophical movement. Belyi was well aware that many of his Russian acquaintances saw his infatuation for Steiner as disastrous for him as a man and a writer. A typical statement can be found

200 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 422 (“A.M. Potstvo” / “Ia slyshal te medlitel’nye zvony...”/). Aleksandr Pozzo, Belyi’s brother-in-law, was also living in Dornach until he was called into military service in 1916.

201 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. II, p. 222.

202 *Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi*, p. 329 (letter to Blok, June 1916).

203 Quoted in Orlov, “Istoriia odnoi ‘druzhby-vrazhdy’”, p. LV.

204 *Ibid.*

205 Belyi, “Geteanum”, p. 25.

206 Fedjuschin, p. 243.

in Gippius' diary in November 1915, where she says that Belyi was "perishing" in the Steiner colony in Switzerland.²⁰⁷

Belyi's route to Moscow lay through France, England, Norway, Sweden and Finland. He arrived in Russia in August 1916.²⁰⁸ The encounter with Petrograd, after an interval of five years, was traumatic.²⁰⁹ The narrator's voice in *Notes of an Eccentric* turns sober and realistic, when Belyi, now clearly separate from the fictional Leonid Ledianoi, presents his impressions. The gloominess, dirt and ugliness of it all were so much more overwhelming as Belyi had fresh visual memories of Paris and London. It was not only civilian, but also military life that made a depressing impact. In Petrograd Belyi saw "soldiers – soldiers, soldiers without rifles, without bearing; their backs bent, their breasts sunken; the faces cheerless and mean; the eyes wandering (...)". The sight of these "unmilitary soldiers" made him remember the "clean 'Tommies', that is the "excellent English soldiers with brightly shining golden shoulder-straps" and the "precision, order, excellent bearing" of the French military.²¹⁰ Nothing of this was to be found in Russia, and Belyi realized that "there was no longer any war, as there was nothing *military* left (...)".²¹¹ Afterwards Belyi would write that revolution had already been in the air in the autumn of 1916. Order No. 1, which introduced democracy into the Russian army after the February revolution with disastrous consequences, was a reality by the autumn of 1916.²¹² The soldiers that Belyi saw had lost all respect for their officers, and the demoralized Russian army was on the brink of disintegration. Belyi's readiness to become a soldier seems to have faded immediately, and he also eventually managed to avoid the army, although he was officially called up on 20 September.²¹³ He was twice granted a respite²¹⁴ and in the end totally exempted from military service.²¹⁵

At Belyi's departure from Dornach, Steiner reminded him that even if it was natural to wish for the victory of one's own country, one should beware of hating the enemy.²¹⁶ Belyi told Steiner that he hoped to be able to follow

207 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 259. See also Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, pp. 86, 90.

208 Elsworth, *Andrei Belyi: A Critical Study of the Novels*, p. 162.

209 Belyi, "O sebe kak pisatele", p. 326.

210 Belyi, *Zapiski chudaka*, vol. 11, pp. 215-6.

211 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

212 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

213 Belyi, *Problemy tvorchestva*, p. 790 (A.V. Lavrov /comp./, "Andrei Belyi: Khronologicheskaja kanva zhizni i tvorchestva").

214 *Ibid.*

215 A. Turgeneva, "Andrei Belyi i Rudolf Shteiner", *Mosty* 13-14 (1968), p. 248.

216 Fedjushchin, p. 316.

an anti-militaristic line in Russia, but with a “sad smile” Steiner expressed his doubts about these plans.²¹⁷ Steiner turned out to be right, with one reservation. As the war was a sign of spiritual crisis and the only way to overcome the crisis was through the development of a new consciousness, one can say that the series of essays with the common title *At the Divide (Na perevale)* that Belyi worked on in 1916–1917 were parts of an anti-war campaign. The articles in *Birzhevye vedomosti* formed the bulk of *The Crisis of Life (Krizis zhizni, 1918)* and *The Crisis of Thought (Krizis mysli, 1918)*.²¹⁸ Belyi is also most likely to have considered his lectures on anthroposophy in Moscow and Petrograd as basically directed against the war.

As a poet and novelist, however, Belyi kept silent about the war. In December 1916 Belyi was asked to participate in a survey concerning “The War and Creative Work”. There is an aggressive note in Belyi’s reply, as if he had interpreted the question as a concealed accusation of aloofness from the historical moment. Belyi avoided commenting on the situation in Russia and instead identified, in accordance with his thoughts from his time in Dornach, constructive forces with the supranational values of culture. He explained his own silence by the fact that he found it difficult to write systematically about things that were currently affecting him emotionally. The general conclusion that he drew from this was that contemporary events were next to impossible to represent truthfully in an artistic form while they were still going on. A true artist, therefore, either anticipated developments or formulated his reflections retrospectively. Belyi had needed a distance of five years from the 1905 revolution to write *Petersburg*, and he likewise assumed that he would only be able to treat the war in a few years’ time.²¹⁹ Gippius had spoken in similar terms, but contrary to her, Belyi also stayed true to this belief in practice.

In a survey one month later, this time concerning “The World War and Russia’s creative forces”, Belyi made an unexpected turn, perhaps under the in-

217 Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, p. 103.

218 Belyi, *Na perevale: I-II* (St. Petersburg, 1918). For an analysis of Belyi’s “crisis” articles, perceived as a cycle, see D.O. Torshilov, “Mirovaia voina i tsiki ‘Krizisov’ Andreia Belogo”, in *Politika i poetika: Russkaia literatura v istoriko-kul’turnom kontekste Pervoi mirovoi voiny. Publikatsiia, issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow, 2014), pp. 209–23.

219 Belyi, “[Voina i tvorchestvo]”. Belyi partly fulfilled his promise to return to the World War as a theme in *Maski* (1933), where some pages were devoted to the World War. In the novel, he attempted with stylistic means to capture “den unpersönlichen Tod im modernen technisch-präzisierten Krieg” (Anton Höning, *Andrej Belyjs Romane: Stil und Gestalt* /Munich, 1965/, p. 95). In the war, men are turned into meat, and tragedy, just as in E.M. Remarque’s *Im Westen nichts Neues*, turns into a headline: “the battle was won” (*ibid.*, p. 96).

fluence of Merezhkovskii, and declared that nationality formed the basis of existence and that all nations had their unique mission in world history.²²⁰ While in Dornach he had taken an internationalist standpoint and had sought the solution to the present crisis on the level of the individual. Now it was national values that had started to gain importance. On his home-coming in August, Belyi had experienced a feeling of estrangement, but later it was as if the sight of defeated and humiliated Russia had aroused the patriot in him. The mood in his contemporary poems, such as "To the Motherland" ("Rodine"), "Russia" ("Rossiia") and "December 1916" ("Dekabr' 1916 goda"), can waver between desperation and joy, doubt and belief, but they always convey a sense of belonging to and unity with Russia.²²¹ The combination of identification with Russia's fate and a simultaneous ambivalent, dualistic attitude to the motherland was reminiscent of Blok's standpoint, and it is striking how closely Belyi's and Blok's ideological development followed the same lines for a few years after the autumn of 1916.

Belyi now saw the main task as the disclosure of reflections of "the national soul" within oneself and the bringing of the individual ego and the ego of the people into harmony.²²² He still refrained from defining Russia's mission, instead stressing as a positive trait its agonizing search for spiritual self-determination.²²³ He found a genuine Russian self-consciousness embodied in Dostoevskii's fictional character Father Zosima, who had established a harmonious unity between thought and nature, a unity that had previously been expressed, for example, by the Germans Goethe, Schelling and Hegel.²²⁴ Belyi was once again stressing the need to create a harmonious consciousness, pairing a growing national awareness with his old adherence to German idealistic philosophy.

Aleksandr Blok: Demoralization on all Sides

In February 1915 Aleksandr Blok wrote in his notebook: "Things are bad in Russia. – Revelry, idleness – apathy."²²⁵ In 1915-1916 the poet whom Gippius

220 Andrei Belyi, "[Vsemirnaia voina i sozidatel'nye sily Rossii]", *Novaia zhizn'* 1 (1917), p. 75.

221 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 432 ("Rossiia"), 433 ("Dekabr' 1916 goda"), 458 ("Rodine" / "V godiny prazdnykh ispytanii...").

222 Belyi, "[Vsemirnaia voina i sozidatel'nye sily Rossii]".

223 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 409 (foreword to *Zvezda*).

224 Belyi, "Priroda".

225 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 257.

had accused of irresponsibility was getting more and more worried about the lack of an active attitude in his fellow-countrymen towards the problems that Russia was facing. Significantly, it was not the events at the front that caused his distress, but their reflections in the general mood. In the autumn of 1914 Blok had found people's faces had grown milder under the influence of the war; now he saw them distorted by bitterness and rage. The young people that Sologub liked to see as the rescuers of Russia, appeared to Blok as a bunch of apolitical, self-satisfied good-for-nothings, paying no heed to the war and the fate of Russia. During Easter 1916 he saw a group of youngsters by the Bronze Horseman, the monument to Peter the Great near St. Isaac's Cathedral. Some of them were smoking under the stomach of the horse, others clinging to its tail or sitting on the serpent which the horse was trampling down. For the symbolist Blok this was not merely contempt for a national monument, but an apocalyptic omen: "Total dissolution. St. Petersburg – *finis*."²²⁶

The key word in this development was "*odichanie*,"²²⁷ demoralization or, literally, "going wild", a word that Blok had found in an aphorism by Dmitrii Merezhkovskii.²²⁸ Blok had long stood isolated among Russian writers during the war, but he now came to respect Merezhkovskii's attitude to the war more and more, while feeling a growing alienation from Sologub, Andreev and others who, as he now felt, had merely been "trolling" thoughtlessly,²²⁹ refusing to face reality. The word "*dikost*", savagery, with all its derivatives occupied a central place in Blok's poetic vocabulary.²³⁰ He had once seen it as a fascinating, integral part of the Russian essence, but the "*odichanie*" that he witnessed now was a totally destructive force, leading to a breakdown of morality and breeding malice between people.

While others were still seeking the cure to the crisis in the power of war itself, by 1916 Blok was prepared to brand the war as the root of all evil. In March he wrote in his notebook that he had at last come to realize that its distinguishing feature was "a lack of greatness (baseness)".²³¹ This war had turned out to be prosaic and petty, devoid of any sense. It was fit neither to inspire heroic deeds or patriotism, nor to transform man. "The so-called Antichrist" had taken over, in the sense that there was a mechanical feeling to events;

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

²²⁸ Merezhkovskii, "Mysli o voine": "Odichanie v kul'ture – iz vsekh odichanii samoe dikoe."

²²⁹ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 277.

²³⁰ Chukovskii, *Kniga ob Aleksandre Bloke*, pp. 113-4.

²³¹ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 283.

they appeared to develop without human influence, and their inner meaning was hidden from man. The war was just an “enormous factory at work, and in this lies its fatal meaning”.²³² If savagery was an Asian trait, an expression of the anarchic, dark forces of the East, then the dehumanization process, which Blok simultaneously pointed out, was a Western feature. It brought with it the notion of an endless continuation of the war. In a note of 28 June 1916 Blok expressed his fears: “Like all boorishness it has no beginning and no end, it is ‘ugly and shapeless’ (*bez-óbrazno*).”²³³

The word “*odichanie*” also appears in one of Blok’s rare poems of this period, namely “You claim that I am cold, reserved, and dry...” (“*Ty tverdish’, chto ia kholoden, zamknut i sukh...*”, 1915-16). “*Odichanie*” is presented not only as a characterization of Russia, but as a diagnosis of the problems of the entire world: “It came to pass. The whole world has run wild, and all around/ Not a single lighthouse tower is shining...”. (“*Vot – svershilos’. Ves’ mir odichal, i okrest/ Ni odin ne mertsat maiak.*”)²³⁴ Significant intertextual references lay hidden here. Briusov had opened his 1914 poem “The Last War” with the same phrase, “It came to pass” (“*Svershilos’*”), as he solemnly greeted the war as the answer to Europe’s unresolved problems. In 1916 the war appeared to Blok, on the contrary, as the fulfilment of all negative forebodings and tendencies. The optimistic expectations of 1914 were by now completely gone, and, as Vladimir Orlov has pointed out, the poem “You claim that I am cold, reserved, and dry...” stands out as the climax of Blok’s major pre-war theme of “the terrible world”.²³⁵

But Blok’s “*svershilos’*” is also referring to Christ’s last words on the cross (John 19:30), an allusion which is reinforced in the same line by the clever use of “*okrest*”, i.e. “all around” but containing the root “*krest*” (cross). In this context, the verb “*svershilos’*” gives a new meaning to the events, as it presents them as part of a higher, predetermined plan, which leads mankind through crucifixion to resurrection. Thus Blok in 1916 joined the other symbolists in their application of the imagery of the crucifixion to the war.

Even if Blok’s attitude to the war was by now totally hostile, this did not mean that he had turned into a pacifist or defeatist. In February 1916 he unexpectedly broke his silence on political questions and took part in an election campaign. In a letter to the voters, published in *Birzhevye vedomosti*, Blok

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 283.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

²³⁴ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 156 (“*Ty tverdish’, chto ia kholoden, zamknut i sukh...*”).

²³⁵ Orlov, *Aleksandr Blok*, p. 203.

urged readers to give their votes to candidates on the “progressive list” in the coming elections to the Petrograd Municipal Duma.²³⁶ This coalition of “Renovationists” and the Progressive-Democratic Bloc was the counterpart of the Progressive Bloc in the State Duma and consisted of the Centre and the moderate Left. Blok’s interest in the election lay in the fact that it indirectly concerned Russia’s defence and thus also its future. As Blok saw it, only a victory for the liberals could secure a municipal budget that would not hit the soldiers’ families hard. There was a connection between Blok’s statement in 1916 and his previous work on the aid committee, as his activities in 1914 had sharpened his perception of the lot of the common people.

During the first winter of the war Blok had been of the opinion that Russia had to fight the war to its conclusion,²³⁷ and nothing indicates that he had changed his opinion on this point by 1916, despite all disappointments. His indirect message to the voters was that Russia’s future was dependent upon how well the war was fought, and this in turn was conditioned by the economic situation and the mood at home. Blok’s open support for the progressive forces could not prevent an overwhelming victory for the conservatives in the elections, but the letter was important as Blok’s first public statement concerning the war. All doubts were still sealed away in the notebook and were voiced only in private discussions.

Blok was the same age as Belyi and likewise the only son in his family. He had therefore also been classified as a militiaman whose fate was dependent upon the duration of the war. The thought that Blok might have to wear a soldier’s uniform and be sent to the war was difficult for many of his friends to accept. At the very beginning of the war the poet Nikolai Gumilev, himself later decorated as a cavalryman, wrote to Anna Akhmatova concerning Blok: “Is it possible that he too will be sent to the front? This would be tantamount to frying nightingales.”²³⁸

Blok was definitely not interested in participating in the war. His aunt and biographer Mariia Beketova writes somewhat naively: “Al[eksandr] Al[ekseevich] was not inclined to fight, especially as he felt no hatred towards the Germans.”²³⁹ Instead of waiting passively for her son to be drafted and letting chance decide where he would end up, in 1916 Blok’s mother started to inves-

236 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. v, pp. 680–1 (“K izbirateliam”). First publ. in *Birzhevye vedomosti* 14.2.1916 15384.

237 *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniiaakh sovremennikov*, vol. 1, p. 392 (V. Piast).

238 *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 96 (Anna Akhmatova, “O Bloke”).

239 M.A. Beketova, *Vospominaniia ob Aleksandre Bloke* (Moscow, 1990), p. 141.

tigate the possibilities of finding a less arduous placement for him. In order to be accepted for a staff appointment one had to give bribes, and there were so many applicants for the artillery that very good contacts were needed.²⁴⁰ But it was precisely in the Heavy Artillery that Blok had a relative, General S. Beliaev.²⁴¹ Blok wanted to be taken under Beliaev's wing, but the general sent a serving officer to enlighten the poet about the harsh realities of war. This visit achieved its goal, and Blok made a firm decision: "I *won't* go there."²⁴²

One of Blok's close friends, the minor poet Vil'gel'm Zorgenfrei, who worked in the Ministry of Trade, emerged as Blok's saviour. Blok's wish to remain in the rear initially aroused a negative response in Zorgenfrei. Blok was the pride of Russian culture, and Zorgenfrei felt it was beneath Blok's dignity not to share the hardships of the people during the war, especially as he had no objections in principle to military service. As a poet Blok had no need of first-hand experience to grasp the essence of events and the given historical moment. But one can also detect behind his hesitation discomfort at the thought of being deprived of his carefree existence and being thrown into an unknown world: "You might catch infections when you all lie there side by side and eat your food from the same cauldron... it's dirty, the conditions are terrible..."²⁴³

Thanks to Zorgenfrei, Blok was given a position in a Construction Engineering Division, maintained by the Union of Zemstvos and Towns. His task was to supervise the building of a new line of defence with trenches and barbed-wire obstructions in the marshes not far from the town of Pinsk.²⁴⁴ Blok departed for his posting at the end of July 1916. The eight months that he was to spend in Pinsk would mean a setback for his writing, something which would cause him increasing frustration, but he fulfilled his tasks as a supervisor irreproachably. In a letter to his mother in the early autumn of 1916, he described life in the Pinsk marshes:

I have become something of a savage; I spend half the day riding around in the woods, fields and marshes, almost without washing; after that we

²⁴⁰ *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: Aleksandr Blok*, vol. 92, part 3, p. 456 (letter from A.A. Kublitskaia-Piottykh to M.I. Ivanova, 16 Nov. 1916).

²⁴¹ Avril Pyman (*The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. 11, p. 408) confuses Blok's relative S.T. Beliaev with General Mikhail Alekseevich Beliaev, the last Minister of War in tsarist Russia. Blok was present when the latter was interrogated in 1917, a rather awkward situation if the general really had been a relative of his.

²⁴² *Pis'ma Aleksandra Bloka k rodnym*, p. 299 (letter to his mother, 28 June 1916).

²⁴³ *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniiaakh sovremennikov*, vol. 11, pp. 24-5 (V. Zorgenfrei).

²⁴⁴ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VIII, pp. 464-5.

empty whole samovars of tea, curse our bosses, doze or fall asleep, scribble away in the office, and sometimes we sit in the courtyard and watch the pigs and geese. There is much that is good in all this, but when it ends it will all seem like a dream.²⁴⁵

The war was within both sight and earshot. Beyond the woods Blok could hear machine-guns and see the sky coloured by cascading shells. Sometimes enemy planes or observation balloons circled overhead. One night in March 1917 Blok was woken up by an exchange of fire and saw searchlights and the horizon lit up by rocket flares. He rode off to watch the fighting from a hill, but before he reached the spot everything had stopped.²⁴⁶ This was the closest Blok ever came to the World War.

Blok was soon promoted from supervisor to chief foreman. As a result he moved to the unit's headquarters, a change which proved not altogether happy. The atmosphere was stiffer and relationships more complicated. By now Blok was also disturbed by the fact that he had regained a position of privilege, reviving in him the old feeling of being a pariah. Starting in 1908 with the article "The People and the Intelligentsia" ("Narod i intelligentsiia") he had been reflecting on the guilt of the Russian intelligentsia, the people's moral right to rid themselves of a shameful system, and the duty of the poet to pay attention to this conflict.²⁴⁷ The situation in Pinsk was a picture in miniature of the class society that Blok hated. Face to face with the workers in Pinsk, many of whom were not Russians but Asians, Blok could not but feel ashamed and guilty again. "This feeling of guilt", writes Blok's biographer Avril Pyman, "shaped his attitude to 'the people' – one of unbounded tolerance – and his attitude to the bourgeoisie and all people of privilege, himself and his family included: an exigent, uncompromising attitude. It also gave a sense of emotional, humane urgency to his ever-mounting opposition to the war."²⁴⁸ More fatally, however, this feeling of guilt ultimately led to a denial of the right to critical thinking and personal opinions. If Blok had only been able to accept his own privileged situation before the World War with difficulty, he now felt that Russia's social structure had been irreparably damaged. The future was in the hands of the masses.²⁴⁹ Blok was unsure how the populace wished to see

245 *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 474.

246 Blok, *Pis'ma Aleksandra Bloka k rodnym*, pp. 336–7 (letter to mother, 1 Mar. 1917).

247 Piskunov, *Tema o Rossii*, p. 138.

248 Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, vol. II, p. 240.

249 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 275.

Russia develop, but on the other hand this was a problem with which the poet was not obliged to concern himself.

Valerii Briusov: After Thirty Months of War

In January 1917, Valerii Briusov was back in the Caucasus in connection with his work on Armenian poetry. At a banquet arranged in his honour, he is supposed to have proposed a toast “to the health of His Imperial Majesty, the Supreme Commander of our army”.²⁵⁰ This toast in Tiflis,²⁵¹ if it was indeed a historical fact, was of course indirectly proposed in honour of the Russian army, which since mid-summer 1916 had brought the Turkish part of Armenia under Russian control. Briusov had never expressed monarchist sympathies at other times, and the story may well be an invention, but its very existence is, nevertheless, revealing for the general image of Briusov as a person who wavered in his convictions.

Briusov’s few utterances about the war in 1916 did not reveal any change in his attitude. On the contrary, it seemed that the more time passed since his stay in Poland, the easier it was for him to return to his initial response. This did not mean that Briusov was again prepared to become directly involved in the latest events. When Gor’kii asked him in the autumn of 1916 to become a contributor to *Letopis’*, a new journal with the reputation of having a defeatist programme, Briusov answered apologetically that he had by now realized that his field was the arts, poetry, and science, and that he had therefore decided to steer clear of all political and social groups.²⁵²

But a strong anti-war poem, the well-known “The Thirtieth Month” (“*Tridt-satyi mesiats*”), was born in January 1917 – presumably during his stay in the Caucasus:

For thirty months in our world
war flings up scarlet dust

²⁵⁰ Khodasevich, p. 54.

²⁵¹ Khodasevich claims that the episode took place in Tiflis in January 1917 at a banquet arranged by Armenians. But whereas Briusov did visit Tiflis, Yerevan and Baku in January 1916, in 1917 he stayed only in Baku. In 1916 Briusov was honoured with banquets in Baku by the Society of Friends of Armenian Literature and in Tiflis by the Caucasian Society of Armenian Writers. (*Briusov i Armeniia: II. Stikhi, stat'i, vospominaniia o V.Ia. Briusove, pis'ma, letopis'* [Erevan, 1989], pp. 155-6.)

²⁵² Il'inskii, p. 652 (letter to Gor'kii).

and black horses of the Valkyries
continuously rush among the clouds.

For thirty months Death and Hunger
roam about, knocking at every door:
they brand the old, they brand the young,
children in their mothers' arms!

For thirty months Europe's god,
Free Labour, is enslaved;
he is digging trenches for War,
casting missiles for Death!

Forgotten are the bright calls
of the initial days of struggle;
troglodytes are gnawing in the woods
to the drum and the summons of a trumpet.

The dreams of enslaved countries
fell victim to idle talk:
some got drunk on bottomless blood,
some are drunk on measureless gold.

A struggle for rights became a slaughter-house;
humiliated, the Ideal drooped...
And all the more absurd, the more discordant,
is the cry for victory, the wild cry!

And Someone dark, Someone commanding,
having grasped the threads of events,
with a devilishly impassive smile
prolongs the uninspired gust.

Oh, sorrow! Enough, enough, enough!
We have unleashed chaos. And who
will settle, with a fateful decision,
all this horror, this lie?

It's time to reject the imaginary apparition,
to understand that the aim has been switched.

Oh, happiness: to rock one's own cradle
to a favourite melody.*²⁵³

Briusov is again making use of allegory to give an overall picture of the war, and the image of the war which emerges from the first three stanzas is indeed frightening and free of all illusions. War, Death and Hunger are the main characters of what is unequivocally presented as a bloody tragedy. The war indiscriminately affects everyone, young and old, soldiers and civilians, and it even uses man's work for its own devastating purposes. The latter thought is of such importance that Briusov gives it a stanza of its own. If, at the beginning of the war, he had still been able to feel fascination for the destructive side of the war, by now he was definitely shocked. In his early poetry, he had glorified free, creative work, including the work of the poet,²⁵⁴ and even if the thought is not explicitly uttered in "The Thirtieth Month", it is implied that the arts, too, have been enslaved and defiled by the war.

However, in the next three stanzas, the pacifist tone alters. Briusov was clearly not prepared to admit the falseness of his expectation that the war would resolve the problems that had been accumulating in peacetime. On the contrary, he justifies – with clear allusions to his own poem "The Last War" – the enthusiasm that prevailed at the beginning of the war, confirming the goals and ideals that had then been held up as central, here defined as freedom and justice. However, a small but significant displacement occurs. Whereas in "The Last War" Briusov had talked about "the call of enslaved tribes", he now speaks of "the dreams of enslaved countries". What Briusov did here, and later also in his booklet *How the War Should Be Ended* (*Kak prekratit' voynu*, 1917), was to

* "Tridtsaty mesiats v nashem mire/ Voyna vzmetaet alyi prakh,/ I koni chernye val'kirii/ Bessmenno mchatsia v oblakakh!// Tridtsaty mesiats, Smert' i Golod,/ Brodia, stuchat u vsekch dverei:/ Kleimiat, kto star, kleimiat, kto molod,/ Detei v ob"iat'iakh materei!// Tridtsaty mesiats, bog Evropy,/ Svobodnyi Trud – poraboshchen;/ On roet dlia Voyny okopy,/ Dlia Smerti l'et snariady on!// Prizyv svetye zabyty/ Pervonachal'nykh dnei bor'by,/ V lesakh gryzutsia troglodity/ Pod baraban i zov truby!// Dostalis' v zhertvu sueslov'iu/ Mechty poraboshchennykh stran:/ Tot op'ianel bezdonnoi krov'iu,/ Tot zolotom bezmernym p'ian...// Bor'ba za pravo stala boinei;/ Unizhen, Ideal ponik.../ I vse nelepei, vse nestroinei/ Krik o pobede, dikii krik!// A Nekto temnyi, Nekto vlastnyi,/ Sobytii niti ukhvativ,/ S ulybkoi d'iavol'ski-besstrastnoi/ Dlit obeskrylennyi poryv...// O gore! Budet! budet! budet! My khaos razviazali. Kto-zh/ Reshen'em rokovym rassudit/ Ves' etot uzhas, etu lozh'?!// Pora otvergnut' prizrak mnimy/, Poniat', chtu podmenili tsel'.../ O, schast'e – pod napev liubimy/ Rodnuiu zylbit' kolybel'!"

²⁵³ Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 233 ("Tridtsaty mesiats").

²⁵⁴ Maksimov, *Briusov*, p. 205.

present his chauvinism and his imperialistic dreams as altruistic support for countries which had been subjected to the aggression of the Central Powers in the war. The lectures Briusov gave in Baku in January 1917 about the Belgian poet Emile Verhaeren provided some of the impetus for this thought. In them Briusov emphasized Verhaeren's untiring devotion to small nations like Belgium, Serbia and Armenia that were fighting heroically against oppression.²⁵⁵ Verhaeren had exerted a strong influence on Briusov ever since the 1890's and the moral stand of the Belgian poet was also held up as an ideal now.

Instead of practising self-criticism, Briusov, like Bal'mont, adopted a theory involving treachery. It is asserted in "The Thirtieth Month" that the central goals of the war had been altered, the pure ideals and dreams defiled and forgotten. The direct motivation for writing "The Thirtieth Month" was an anniversary. According to the Russian calendar, by January 1917 the war had been in progress for thirty months. The symbolic meaning of the number thirty – Judas' thirty pieces of silver – was of importance for Briusov, who employs thirty in the poem as a symbol of deceit, egoism and greed. When Briusov is about to identify the traitors, he becomes evasive. It is certainly mistaken to say that he had come to understand "the imperialist, antinational character of the World War".²⁵⁶ Briusov is not yet drawing a Leninist conclusion, dividing society into oppressors and oppressed and calling for revolution. He talks vaguely about those who have been intoxicated by blood and gold, a possible reference to war speculators, a frequent target of criticism in this period. It is more characteristic of Briusov that, when trying to draw a conclusion, in the last three stanzas he changes the solemn, lofty Fate of "The Last War" into "Someone dark, Someone commanding", a satanic and capricious power, out of reach of human thought and prayers. As in the earlier allegorical poem, "The Feast of War", man has been turned into the plaything of the inhuman powers War, Death, Hunger and Someone dark with their unknown and frightening ambitions.

A closer comparison between "The Last War" and "The Thirtieth Month" shows how drastically Briusov had by now reconsidered his view of the war. In the former poem it was peace that had lasted too long, whereas in the latter it is the war. The war should have been a "purgatory" leading to "a transfigured world", but instead it opened the door to "horror" and "the lie". The destruction, which Briusov had originally seen as a creative force, in reality gave birth to chaos. The cry for freedom of the enslaved peoples has turned into shrill,

²⁵⁵ *Briusov i Armeniia*, vol. II, p. 255.

²⁵⁶ Sivovolov, p. 95.

meaningless yells, and the heroic soldiers on the battlefields of the war have turned into ferocious cavemen, lost in a dark forest.

It is not possible to identify any special reason for the anti-war pathos of "The Thirtieth Month". It was rather the result of a growing frustration, as despite the war's duration and the enormous human and material sacrifices it had demanded, it had not performed any of the tasks that Briusov had set for it. Earlier than most of his colleagues, he was prepared to admit that the war had turned into a senseless tragedy that should be ended.

Briusov's perspective is supranational, when he talks about Europe and "our world", and the "we" of the poem denotes all humanity and not just the Russians. The poetic appeal for drastic action to curtail the war goes far beyond the call for a separate peace between Russia and Germany, an idea which was topical at that time. In the last lines Briusov gazes into the future, defining happiness as rocking a cradle to the tunes of an old lullaby. The worldwide utopia of "The Last War" has shrunk into something small and concrete. Instead of dreams of Russia as a world power, Briusov proposes a return to clearly defined national values that must be saved from destruction. Instead of following the war's path of death, one should love and cherish the new approaching life.

"The Thirtieth Month" would hardly have been passed by the censors in January 1917. Briusov himself seems to have been alarmed by its anti-militaristic note, as he shut it in his desk-drawer to await better times. When the poem was eventually published six months later, circumstances had changed drastically, a fact which turned out to be to the poem's disadvantage. For between the composition and the publication of Briusov's poem there occurred the February revolution, an event with profound consequences for both the psychological and the political situation in Russia.

The War: Act III (1917-1918)

The February Revolution of the Spirit

The entries in Zinaida Gippius' diary make it possible to follow the course of the February revolution in Petrograd day by day. Aware of the historical significance of the events, Gippius recorded what she saw and heard several times a day, from the first street riots on 23 February to the abdication of the Tsar and the formation of the Provisional Government on 2 March. For the time being the centre of action was not the battle lines but the cities of Petrograd and Moscow. Writers like Gippius and Briusov went out among the crowds, attended demonstrations and meetings and talked to soldiers and workers. The atmosphere was electrifying. Gippius felt this initial stage of the revolution to be "bright as the first moments of love".¹ Blok, who had arranged a swift return from the front, walked the streets of Petrograd as if in a dream, intoxicated by the freedom and joy.² The sight of disciplined revolutionary soldiers filled the usually reserved Merezhkovskii with rapture.³ Sologub felt as if he was in a temple when watching "the good-natured faces" around him. People appeared to be completely changed and class barriers seemed to have disappeared.⁴ As in 1914, there was again the feeling of a wonderful, instantaneous metamorphosis, bordering on a metaphysical miracle.

The rapprochement between the revolutionary authorities and the intelligentsia was a sign of the times. The new Minister of Justice, Aleksandr Kerenskii, was a close friend of Merezhkovskii and Gippius, and during his time in power he was to visit them several times on dramatic occasions.⁵ Blok also found he had an acquaintance in the Provisional Government, Mikhail

1 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 163.

2 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VIII, p. 480.

3 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 292.

4 Fedor Sologub, "Preobrazhenie", *Birzhevyye vedomosti* 5.3.1917 16120; Fedor Sologub, "Liturgiia", *Birzhevyye vedomosti* 8.3.1917 16124.

5 Another close friend, Anton Kartashev, was appointed Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod in August 1917 and later Minister of Religion in the Provisional Government. Through him Merezhkovskii and Gippius were able to work for a separation of the church from the state, an issue which was debated also in the Religious-Philosophical Society. (Pachmuss, *Intellect and Ideas in Action*, p. 646.)

Tereshchenko, the Minister of Finance. Tereshchenko was a sugar millionaire from the Ukraine, who had been elected to the State Duma five years previously as an independent liberal. His ministerial post has since been seen as a manifestation of masonic patronage,⁶ but Blok knew him as a generous supporter of the arts, with a genuine interest in poetry, theatre and ballet. Tereshchenko had been the proprietor of the publishing house *Sirin*, which had brought out works by the symbolists before the war, including poetry by Blok and Belyi's novel *Petersburg*. Blok sent Tereshchenko a congratulatory telegram from Pinsk.

The rapid collapse of the Russian autocracy came as a surprise, but even so the writers were not slow to give their interpretation of events. Views on the immediate significance of the revolution could differ, but the general attitude was enthusiastic. Bal'mont, Briusov, Gippius, Ivanov and Sologub celebrated the revolution in poems. Merezhkovskii offered the Provisional Government indirect support in the form of a booklet about the Decembrists. His idea was to reduce tensions within the army by showing the soldiers that the first Russian revolutionaries had been officers and aristocrats. During a visit on 12 March Merezhkovskii was asked personally by Kerenskii to write the book. *The First-Born Children of Freedom* (*Perventsy svobody*) was published in an edition of one million copies just a few weeks later, and it reached an even broader audience through the family journal *Niva*. In his dedication, Merezhkovskii called Kerenskii the ideological successor of the Decembrists and, consequently, the rightful leader for the present day. In a situation of "dual power" – divided between the Provisional Government and the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies – the symbolists initially chose to support Kerenskii and the government.

The interest that some of the symbolists took in the question of a new national anthem was indicative of the change in their social role. The composer Aleksandr Grechaninov was the first to realize that Vasilii Zhukovskii's "God Save the Tsar" ("Bozhe tsaria khrani...") had become outdated and needed to be replaced. In Fedor Sologub's "Anthem" ("Gimn") of 1914 he found the sonorous lines, "Long live Russia,/ the great country!" ("Da zdravstvuet Rossiia,/ Velikaia strana!"),⁷ but dissatisfied with the rest of the text, he asked another symbolist, Konstantin Bal'mont, to write some new stanzas. The choice of poet was not accidental. The poems that Bal'mont had published in the Moscow newspapers *Utro Rossii* and *Russkoe slovo* revealed a desire to

6 Raymond Pearson, *The Russian Moderates and the Crisis of Russian Tsarism 1914-1917* (London, 1977), p. 172.

7 Sologub, "Gimn", *Voina*, p. 5. First publ. in *Otechestvo* 4 (1915).

become the voice of the new era. A broadsheet with Bal'mont's and Grechaninov's "Anthem of Free Russia" ("Gimn svobodnoi Rossii"), now opening with the line "Long live Russia,/ the free country!", was on sale one day later.⁸ On 13 March it was performed at the re-opening of the Bolshoi theatre.⁹ The anthem became popular and might eventually have been given official recognition, if it had not been for the October revolution. Still, Bal'mont did have competitors. One of them was Viacheslav Ivanov, who nursed hopes of having his own "Anthem" ("Gimn") accepted as Russia's national anthem.¹⁰ Peace, freedom, unity and labour were the main themes of Ivanov's text, while a reference to Holy Russia added a religious and historical dimension. In his alternative title, "A Chorale of the New Russia" ("Khorovaia pesn' novoi Rossii"), Ivanov indicated that he had given a poetic formulation to his dream of an organic, national type of democracy, in which the poet would have a prominent role. In "Anthem" the poet is assigned the role of a rhapsodist, with the assembly echoing his words in chorus. This was in line with Ivanov's aspiration to renew Ancient Greek drama as a form of cultic act, where the people would play the chorus.

Valerii Briusov, who probably found Bal'mont's text too commonplace and Ivanov's "Anthem" too elitist, discussed the issue in an article dated 22 March. His outspoken idealism and lack of chauvinism testify to the changes that Briusov was going through at this time. It was of primary importance for Briusov that the new national anthem should be an anthem for the whole of Russia and not only for Russians, something which meant, for example, excluding references to Orthodoxy. The themes of military greatness and geographical vastness had likewise to be rejected. What should be dealt with was the struggle for freedom throughout history, responsibility for the national heritage, and, above all, "the brotherhood of Russia's peoples, collective labour for the common good, the call for 'peace for the whole world'".¹¹ Briusov never actually wrote a text that would have corresponded to his demands. In the event, none of the symbolists wrote Russia's new anthem. The course of events made the whole issue sink into oblivion, turning it into another example of the gap between the symbolist "legend in the making" and reality.

The symbolists did not limit themselves to pondering the immediate political and social significance of the February revolution. The connection between

8 A.T. Grechaninov, *Moia zhizn'* (New York, [1951]), p. 108.

9 "V Bol'shom teatre", *Utro Rossii* 14.3.1917 70. The music is said to be *La Marseillaise*.

10 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 60 ("Gimn"). See Ivanova, p. 74.

11 Valerii Briusov, "O novom russkom gimne: Prolegomeny", in *Vetv': Sbornik Kluba moskovskikh pisatelei* (Moscow, 1917), p. 259.

current events and the anticipated revolution of the spirit emerged as a vital issue. The sudden and peaceful character of the February revolution could be seen as confirmation of the unique, messianic status of the Russian people. Seen from this viewpoint the national uprising and the birth of a new Russia were but the prelude to a string of universal events leading up to the final spiritual transfiguration of man.

The revolutionary mood had already been strong in the symbolist camp prior to the February revolution. Viacheslav Ivanov was an exception in this respect. In his wartime articles he had not touched upon the future of autocracy, but one of his 1915 laments for fallen soldiers included a conspicuous prayer for the prosperity of the Tsar, "the Sovereign of our dear Fatherland".¹² A neo-Slavophile orientation had replaced Ivanov's revolutionary mood of 1905. Against this background, the political results of the February revolution could not inspire him, but he was still prepared to share the joy of his fellow poets. In the poems that Ivanov sent from Sochi to *Russkoe slovo*, the revolution was strictly interpreted as a Christian event. In Biblical fashion, the tropes were taken from the sphere of agriculture. In spite of the optimistic prognosis of 1914, the earth had remained dry and the human soul weary. Now the longed-for moment of harvest was drawing nearer, as the Master descended from Heaven together with His archangels to fulfill His work ("Tikhaia zhatva").¹³

What Ivanov celebrated in the February revolution was an invisible, metaphysical miracle: the Child was being born in Russia ("Poet na skhodke"). A perceptive reader would have recognized the claim from an earlier poem by Ivanov, "Christmas" ("Rozhdestvo", 1914), a parallel that the poet himself had no interest in drawing, as his previous forebodings had turned out to be false.¹⁴ Now belief in a Second Coming had been regained, and Ivanov wanted to be among the first to celebrate the holy miracle. Filled as he was with anticipations of a spiritual miracle, he even dared to belittle all yearnings for political freedom: "What is your slavish freedom/ in the face of His freedom?" ("Chto vashi rabskie svobody/ Pered svobodoiu ego?").¹⁵

Ivanov's view of the February revolution as a sacred mystery was provocative and as such bound to meet with astonishment outside the symbolist circle. In the poem, "The Poet at the Gathering" ("Poet na skhodke"), he at-

12 Ivanov, "Zaneseny v skrizhali družheskoi rukoiu..."

13 Ivanov, "Tikhaia zhatva", *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 55. First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 1.4.1917 73.

14 Viacheslav Ivanov, "Rozhdestvo", in *Klich* (1915).

15 Viacheslav Ivanov, "Poet na skhodke", *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 57. First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 1.4.1917 73.

tempted a clarification of his vision. Alluding to the double meaning of the word “skhodka”, that is not only the contemporary meaning of a political, revolutionary meeting, but also the national and historical meaning of a gathering in a peasant community, Ivanov presents lack of understanding for his views as a conflict between the prophetic poet and the earthbound crowd. The latter accuses the symbolist of misinterpreting events, as the revolution was not a gift from above, but the outcome of “popular hatred”.¹⁶ The title “Quiet Harvest” is also dismissed by them as misleading. Instead of the weariness and ominous silence that Ivanov felt were still reigning, others conceived the revolution as a thundering feast of spring. Most alarming for the symbolist is, however, the fact that his words about an imminent revolution of the spirit are refuted as having no equivalent in reality. The February revolution was acceptable to Ivanov only as part of the divine plan of transfiguration, while alternative views were distressing expressions of lack of belief in the poet’s visionary power. He gave a model of a functional relationship between the poet and the crowd in the above-mentioned poem “Anthem”, where the poet dictates his words to the chorus made up of the people. According to Ivanov, a true artist invariably and infallibly expressed the ultimate depths of the consciousness of his age and thereby also the inner, sometimes unconscious strivings of his own people,¹⁷ and this was the status he aspired to in 1917.

Similar unconcern for the socio-political aspects of the February revolution and fixation on things yet to come can be seen in Andrei Belyi. According to Belyi himself, he had been waiting for a new revolution since 1911,¹⁸ and Gippius, whom Belyi had frequently visited after his return to Russia in 1916, tells how strong an impact the February revolution actually had upon him.¹⁹ Nevertheless, it was but a weak reflection of a coming revolution of the spirit, which would bring about the inner transfiguration of man and the attainment

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Quoted in West, pp. 70–1.

¹⁸ Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, p. 102. Nevertheless, when asked in 1914 by Rudolf Steiner whether the war would immediately lead to a revolution in Russia, Belyi gave a negative answer. Rudolf Steiner himself made a better guess in 1906. Asked by Nikolai Minskii, a prominent figure in early Russian symbolism, when the Russian revolution would occur, he had answered: “In about twelve years’ time.” (Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere*, p. 73.) Belyi, too, had forebodings of the end of autocracy in connection with the Revolution of 1905. To Marina Tsvetaeva in 1921 he claimed that he had seen in a dream how the tsar was killed and the tsarist Russia collapsed (Marina Tsvetaeva, *Proza* /Moscow, 1989/, p. 476 /“Plennyi dukh: Moia vstrecha s Andreem Belym”/).

¹⁹ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, pp. 293–5, 300.

of true freedom. Belyi's revolutionaries were Nietzsche, Henrik Ibsen and the ultra-individualistic anarchist Max Stirner,²⁰ and the February revolution he perceived as being in their spirit.

Unlike Ivanov, Belyi had no aspirations to pass on his interpretation to the masses. Instead he singled out silence as the only appropriate reaction to great social upheavals. It was not a question of displaying indifference, but simply the consequence of an emotionally overwhelming experience.²¹ The experience of 1914 had shown this to be true in the case of Belyi himself. Moreover, the reflection of the present moment in poetry always led to a profanation of art, a thought we have also met in Gippius' writings. Belyi ridiculed those who had hastened to hail the 1905 Revolution, who had "wailed" in print during the World War and who now celebrated the February revolution by rhyming "svobóda" (freedom) with "naróda" (of the people).²² He could have used his own patriotic poetry as an example of a dramatic loss of taste. When striking the attitude of a civic poet in 1916, Belyi uncritically adopted dead metaphors like "a sea of tears" ("more slez")²³ or empty phrases like "My country, my own country!/ I am yours, I am yours." ("Strana moia, strana moia rodnaia!/ Ia – tvoi, ia – tvoi").²⁴

As a poet, Belyi refrained from commenting on the February revolution, but in March he made an unexpected appearance as an orator at a meeting of Moscow writers. The subject was the revolution and Russia's war policy. The fact that Belyi's words appear not to have been recorded anywhere indicates that his speech was conceived as out of keeping with current thinking. The same impression was undoubtedly made by his brochure *Revolution and Culture (Revoliutsiia i kul'tura)* of May 1917. Belyi repeated earlier concepts, once again cleansed of their national aspect. A new consciousness had to be developed by establishing a direct relation to the world of phenomena and by fusing oneself with "the inner rhythm of the elements".²⁵ All this had little, if any, relevance to the Russian situation, and in practice it meant a passive acceptance of the course of events.

For Konstantin Bal'mont the essence of the revolution could be summed up, just as in 1905, by the word "freedom". He aspired to a liberation of the mind, a concept closely linked to his individualism, even more than to political

20 Andrei Belyi, *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura* (Moscow, 1917), p. 24.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 10-1.

23 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 458 ("Rodine").

24 *Ibid.*, p. 421 ("A.M. Potstso").

25 Belyi, *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*, p. 18.

freedom. Just as the war had been a defence of the right to individuality, the revolution was an insurrection against all forms of mental slavery. The miracle of freedom was turned into a tangible reality, thereby unveiling new utopian horizons ("Moskva, 2-go marta 1917 goda").²⁶

Bal'mont illustrated the apocalyptic side of the revolution through the conventional simile of turning the desert into a garden ("Blagovestie").²⁷ Another central symbol for the coming postwar era was spring. In 1917 revolution and the spring merged in a concrete fashion, creating the illusion of the fulfilment of a dream. "Our native land/ rose in the spring" ("Nash krai rodnoi/ Vosstal vesnoi"), Bal'mont wrote in "Christ Is Risen" ("Khristos voskrese"), illustrating symbolically, if not very originally, the transformation that Russia was undergoing.²⁸ Winter turned into spring, darkness into light. The ice covering the river cracked and the river flooded its banks, promising a rich harvest. Hovering over the fertile spring landscape of "A Spring Call" ("Vesennii klich") is the sun, of old Bal'mont's main symbol of ecstatic renewal.²⁹

To compare the revolution to natural phenomena, or even to a miracle, logically meant a denial of the role of the people. It was, however, of equal importance for Bal'mont to depict the revolution as a creative feat, the outcome of a long struggle for freedom. The leading role belonged to the revolutionaries,³⁰ but the Russian people, too, had shown its greatness. The February revolution meant the resurrection of a people that, according to Bal'mont, had been lying in the grave for three centuries, that is ever since the Romanov dynasty had come to power.³¹ The revolution testified that the soul of the people had not been mortally wounded, but had preserved its thirst for freedom.³²

Bal'mont's exultation reveals the seriousness of the doubts that he had felt about his compatriots during the period of reaction. The February events enabled him to feel national pride again. The revolution also appeared to have torn down all barriers, such as the one between the people and the intelligentsia, and between the silent majority and the revolutionaries, turning all into

26 K. Bal'mont, "Moskva, 2-go marta 1917 goda", *Utro Rossii* 3.3.1917 60.

27 K. Bal'mont, "Blagovestie", *Russkoe slovo* 25.3.1917 68.

28 K. Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net* (Moskva, 1918), p. 27 ("Khristos voskrese"). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 1.4.1917 73.

29 K. Bal'mont, "Vesennii klich", *Utro Rossii* 2.3.1917 59.

30 Bal'mont and Grechaninov donated the proceeds of their anthem to former political prisoners (Grechaninov, p. 108). Bal'mont also announced that he had donated a further hundred roubles to the revolutionaries as a compensation for days lost in prison ("Pis'mo v redaktsiiu", *Russkoe slovo* 7.3.1917 52).

31 K. Bal'mont, *Slovo o muzyke* (Moscow, [1917]), p. 7.

32 K. Bal'mont, "Slava narodu", *Russkoe slovo* 12.3.1917 69.

brothers ("Vol'nyi stikh").³³ Full of benevolence towards all men, Bal'mont exchanged the egotistic "I", that was otherwise at the centre of his poetry, for a collective "we". It was difficult to place Bal'mont politically. Expressions like "land and freedom" ("Slava krest'ianinu")³⁴ and "the will of the people" ("Slava narodu")³⁵ were the slogans of the Socialist Revolutionaries, but Bal'mont later defined himself more in terms of an anarchist and a sympathizer with Petr Kropotkin.³⁶ Anarchism had also been at the core of his credo in 1905, when he wrote in a letter that "a social-democratic dictatorship is as abhorrent to me as autocracy, or any power".³⁷ The party aspect was, however, of minor importance in 1917. Bal'mont did not want to use his influence to support the interests of one group only, but saw his role as that of a national poet.

In April, Easter replaced spring as the dominant symbol in Bal'mont's poetry, resulting in a widening of the scope of his vision. The parallel that he drew between the February revolution and the resurrection of Christ had a distinctly nationalist messianic flavour. Both events were claimed to have defeated slavery and brought man inner freedom.³⁸ The present moment was "the Easter morning of a universal (*vselenskoï*) truth", as the Russian revolution was bringing good tidings for the whole of mankind.³⁹

Such attempts to draw a parallel between the Russian revolution and the Christian drama of Easter were rejected by Dmitrii Merezhkovskii as premature, if not necessarily false. He rejoiced at the newly-won freedom, but saw Russia as being far from a spiritual resurrection. There still existed a "spirit without flesh", i.e. the people, and a "flesh without spirit", i.e. the Orthodox church.⁴⁰ A Christian sociality had not yet emerged, and in the context of Merezhkovskii's apocalyptic religion, the February revolution thus signified only a first step towards the realization of the Third Testament.

Yet Merezhkovskii acknowledged a religious streak in current events. In connection with the 1905 revolution, he had equated autocracy with the An-

33 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 26 ("Vol'nyi stikh"). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 1.4.1917 73.

34 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 26 ("Slava krestianinu"). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 1.4.1917 73.

35 Bal'mont, "Slava narodu".

36 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, pp. 11-2.

37 Quoted by Vl. Orlov, *Pereput'ia: Iz istorii russkoi poezii nachala XX veka* (Moscow, 1976), p. 203.

38 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, pp. 26-7 ("Khristos voskrese").

39 Bal'mont, *Slovo o muzyke*, p. 7.

40 D. Merezhkovskii, "Angel revoliutsii", *Russkoe slovo* 1.4.1917 73.

tichrist,⁴¹ and the years of reaction had not made him revise his convictions. Any revolution had a positive religious meaning, as it was a revolt against godless state power. The whole history of the Russian revolutionary movement, from the Decembrist uprising to the February revolution, was, furthermore, permeated by a spirit of sacrificial love, which was Christian in its essence. It was this quality that distinguished the Russians and their history from the other nations of the world. "There has perhaps never been, since the time of the first Christian martyrs, a more Christian, a more Christ-like phenomenon in world history than the Russian revolution."⁴² In Russia, revolution was an expression of a thirst for universalism, that is for spiritual concord between all nations. For Russians the revolution was therefore a religious deed, and the freedom they ultimately yearned for was a universal freedom in Christ.

The dream of the Third Testament did not prevent Merezhkovskii from paying attention to political realities. The part played in the February revolution by the soldiers and workers had been of immediate significance, but Merezhkovskii saw it as his task to stress the historical importance of the intelligentsia. The first revolutionaries – the Decembrists – had belonged to the intelligentsia, and in the 1917 revolution it was the intelligentsia, in the person of Kerenskii, that stood for the indispensable supra-national aspect of the revolution.⁴³ If the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies represented the people, then the Provisional Government embodied the intelligentsia, and it was therefore natural for Merezhkovskii to identify with it.⁴⁴

Zinaida Gippius stood for a more careful observation of the forces of revolution, even if she, too, was carried away by feelings of enthusiasm. The fall of autocracy enabled Russia to be turned into a land of freedom and equality. Not only should the social forms of life be renewed, but also man's personality and his religious consciousness, which until now had been stifled by autocracy and the Orthodox Church. The dream of a revolution of the spirit had re-awoken in Gippius, but she still had her moments of doubt about the true nature of events. She had looked for a revolt from above, but the February revolution could just as well turn out to be the beginning of the feared rebellion from below, eventually leading to riots, chaos and destruction. Russia needed firm political power, but so far it was the street meeting and not the Provisional

⁴¹ Bedford, p. 130.

⁴² Merezhkovskii, "Angel revoliutsii".

⁴³ Merezhkovskii, "Est' Rossii".

⁴⁴ D. Merezhkovskii, "14 marta", *Den'* 23.3.1917 16.

Government that ruled. In this situation Gippius put her hope in her friend, Aleksandr Kerenskii.⁴⁵

Fedor Sologub had been working for a moral and spiritual transformation of Russia during the war. Nevertheless, his frequent use of words like “freedom” and “democracy”, his appeals to fight “the chronic illnesses of the state organism”,⁴⁶ his demands for a government that would enjoy the confidence of the people and for the participation of a broader strata of the population in Russia’s political and social life,⁴⁷ created uneasiness in the authorities. During his 1916 tour, Sologub was prohibited from appearing in public in several towns, even though his aim was to heighten national self-esteem and stiffen the collective will to continue the war.⁴⁸

Sologub’s Russia had no place for a tsar, as he considered development within the framework of the existing socio-political system impossible. The February revolution that had done away with autocracy also fitted in well with Sologub’s view of history. Just like the war, it was one of the cataclysms that led towards the grand utopia and as such it had to be accepted fearlessly. The revolution was commonly viewed as a result of the war, since the military struggle had exposed all the weaknesses of tsarism, but Sologub interpreted the connection in a quite different way. For him the revolution was the crowning fulfilment of the cleansing process that humankind was going through, and he saw a mystical bond between the sacrifices that had been made in the World War and the actions which made the February revolution possible:

War only exposes the universal, organic evil that has reached a high level of tension, and out of this evil it extracts the sweetest juice of self-sacrifice; in the war, universal evil exhausts itself and turns into a form of positive blessing. The revolution completes the war’s task, by raising self-sacrifice to the level of a heroic uprising against evil and by transforming its energy into the highest degree of civic valour.⁴⁹

Generalizing deceptively and justifying his own expectations, Sologub now claimed that at the outbreak of the war the Russian people as a whole had felt that the evil of the war would turn into something positive and that the final

45 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, pp. 305-6.

46 Fedor Sologub, “Proгноzy: I. Smert’ anekdota”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 6.1.1917 16022.

47 Fedor Sologub, “Pod spudom”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 28.8.1915 15053.

48 Sologub, “Paradoksy s puti: O prezrenii k vremeni...”; Fedor Sologub, “Paradoksy s puti: V. Vstrechi i nedoumeniiia”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 4.4.1916 15482.

49 Fedor Sologub, “Miatezhnaia muza”, *Birzhevye vedomosti* 30.5.1917 16256.

result would be a transfiguration not only of Russia, but of the whole world.⁵⁰ What followed was a Calvary drama: Russia was betrayed – Sologub did not specify by whom – and crucified. Few dared to believe any longer in the possibility of salvation – Sologub had in fact himself turned into a doubter – but resurrection had come in the form of the revolution.⁵¹ The revolution signified the birth of a new Russia, and thus it partly explained and justified the enthusiasm of 1914: “This is by no means a revolution! It is a radiant transfiguration, the greatest of (...) all miracles.”⁵² An unshakable belief in the possibility of a total metamorphosis made Sologub devote himself again to all the illusions that he had attached to the war less than three years earlier. The very character of the February revolution reaffirmed his belief in Russia’s greatness and its historical role.

The February revolution was but the starting point of a long path of development, in which national social tasks were of the most immediate concern. In “Stanzas in Praise of Unity” (“Stansy edineniiu”), Sologub spoke of the enormous task that lay ahead, now that the people had been given the power to reform Russia.⁵³ As for the poets, their function was that of an independent spiritual and intellectual force above all political parties and social classes. Sologub felt sympathy both for Kerenskii and the Menshevik Georgii Plekhanov, but, like Bal’mont, he refrained from tying himself down to any political programme. He only tried to exert concrete influence on a few specific issues. The death penalty was the target of the poem “Let’s preserve the sanctity of death penalties...” (“Ostavim sviatost’ smertnykh kaznei...”), expressing the thought that the martyrdom of the revolutionaries in tsarist Russia had made the death penalty holy and that it should therefore not be used in *free* Russia.⁵⁴ Another of his reform demands was equality for all, independent of nationality, religion and sex.⁵⁵ For those who were familiar with Sologub’s struggle against anti-Semitic discrimination in Russia, this standpoint did not come as a surprise.

50 Sologub, “Derzanie do kontsa”.

51 Sologub, “Liturgiia”.

52 Sologub, “Preobrazhenie”.

53 Fedor Sologub, “Stansy edineniiu”, *Ogonek* 11 (1917), p. 3.

54 Fedor Sologub, “Ostavim sviatost’ smertnykh kaznei...”, *Birzhevyye vedomosti* 9.3.1917 16126. The death penalty was abolished by one of the first decrees of the Provisional Government, but it was reintroduced at the front as a result of mass desertions during the summer of 1917.

55 Fedor Sologub, “Zheny i materi”, *Birzhevyye vedomosti* 7.3.1917 16122.

What Valerii Briusov saw on the streets of Moscow during the crucial days of late February and early March was efficiently turned into “diary poems”, in which the poet’s usual awareness of the historical dimension was given expression. “Liberated Russia” (“Osvobozhdennaia Rossiia”) shows him again in the role of the enraptured witness of one of history’s turning points: “Blessed is he who, in reality, sees moments/ that, before, were conceived in dreams!” (“Blazhen, v’iav’ videvshii mgnoven’ia,/ Chto prezhde grezilis’ vo sne!”).⁵⁶ Briusov gives a rapid survey of the revolutionary struggle that had now been crowned with success. When he speaks of “the days of the bloody struggle”, as opposed to “the days of the past”, and of those who gave their lives for their native country, not on scaffolds or in jails, but “in the snow”, he is apparently including the soldiers of the war among the heroes of the revolution and, by extension, trying to present his own pro-war position as having revolutionary merit.

The revolution awoke and liberated the Russian people and thereby transformed the whole of Russia.⁵⁷ The freedom won was not only political but also mental, and Briusov optimistically concluded that there could be no return to the past for a people that had once tasted freedom: “(...) the world, condemned and old,/ vanished like a cloud of smoke,/ and in radiance a new one arose!” (“/.../ mir, osuzhdennyi i staryi,/ Ischez, slovno oblako dyma,/ I novyi v siian’i voznik!”).⁵⁸ These lines from the poem “On the Streets (February 1917)” (“Na ulitsakh /Fevral’ 1917 g./”) had an apocalyptic ring, but even so their meaning was far more restricted and concrete than the corresponding assertions of the other symbolists. And whereas in 1914 Briusov had anticipated a transfiguration of the whole world, his hopes for the present were restricted to Russia.

The Soviet critic G. Lelevich claims on the basis of “Liberated Russia” that Briusov was the only “bourgeois” writer already to have realized in early March that the real struggle still lay ahead.⁵⁹ Actually Briusov was no more clear-sighted than others, when expressing fear that the national unity that had been born in the revolution would not last. That the revolution was threatened by inner splits was common knowledge, and in Briusov’s case it is of greater interest to note that for the time being he talked about the emerging struggle for power with the same regret as, for example, Bal’mont and Gippius.

56 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 218 (“Osvobozhdennaia Rossiia”). First publ. in *Russkie vedomosti* 3.3.1917 49.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 219 (“Na ulitsakh /Fevral’ 1917 g./”). First publ. in *Russkie vedomosti* 5.3.1917 51.

59 Lelevich, p. 167.

Briusov brought a discordant note to the chorus of enraptured writers by giving voice to another fear. It was the same apprehension that Ivanov had expressed in his toast to Briusov at the banquet in January 1915, namely that poetry would be forgotten, or enslaved by politics, and that “Dream, Love and Beauty” – the original ideals of a symbolist – would be declared unnecessary. Briusov’s “Pray” (“Molites”) has a prophetic quality, with its requiem-like character and its misgivings about the future for pure, free poetry in revolutionary Russia.⁶⁰ This dread was not only a poetic gesture. In his letters Briusov commented that his public appearances and involvement in collective endeavours had once again convinced him that he was essentially a non-party person who should stay out of politics and stick to his writing.⁶¹ Nevertheless, he was soon to go against his inner convictions again and accept the role of a civic poet, this time for good.

Aleksandr Blok was in the Pinsk marshes when the February revolution broke out. Driven by a wish to be at the centre of events, he asked for a month’s leave and arrived in Petrograd on 19 March. Like the other symbolists, he saw the revolution as something unique and genuinely national, but in its essence and inherent possibilities a much more profound phenomenon than a mere political coup. In a letter he wrote, “Something has occurred that nobody is yet able to evaluate, because history has never before witnessed events on such a grand scale. It had to happen, and it could only happen in Russia.”⁶² He was aware of the precariousness of the situation, but pinned his hopes on metaphysical forces, not on any resolute measures by the new authorities. “As one miracle has taken place, there will, inevitably, be more miracles”, he wrote.⁶³ Blok was hardly foreseeing the October revolution, as has been implicitly claimed,⁶⁴ but more likely reflecting upon the various possibilities for preventing counter-revolution, the problem which occupied his mind for the first months after the February revolution. For the symbolists, “miracle” was not just a hackneyed metaphor, but the very substance of historical progress. Blok was not the only one in the spring of 1917 who took into consideration the possibility of unforeseen, supernatural forces. In April, Belyi wrote to him,

60 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, p. 216 (“Molites”). In 1905 Briusov, while praising the magnitude of the revolution, had also mourned the fate of the poets who were not needed anymore. (*Sobr. soch.*, vol. I, pp. 634–5, comm. to “Griadushchie gunny”.)

61 *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 85, p. 26 (letter to A.N. Tikhonov, Mar. 1917).

62 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VIII, p. 479.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 480.

64 Dolgopopov, *Poema Aleksandra Bloka “Dvenadsat”* (Leningrad, 1979), p. 21.

"The situation is critical, difficult, disturbing, but...all the same I am full of hope: I hope that a miracle will save Russia from possible breakdown."⁶⁵

Blok saw as the main task of the moment the establishment of democracy,⁶⁶ something which would finally resolve the distressing contradictions between the intelligentsia and the people. For a moment it even seemed to Blok that his mission as a poet had come to an end with the revolution. "Does democracy have any need for artists?" he asked himself.⁶⁷ To become involved in political life was for the moment an impossible thought. Blok humbly equated being an artist with being a witness.⁶⁸ Unlike his symbolist colleagues, he had as yet no vision of a coming universal revolution of the spirit, and as a poet he remained dumb, a fact which shows that in spite of his instantaneous joy he did not perceive any harmony in the "music" of the moment. The great discord was the war, which for Blok had a much more personal relevance than for the other symbolists.

Who Is for the War? Who Is Against?

In the flush of the revolution the World War could be forgotten, but only for a moment. The future of Russian democracy was dependent on the outcome

65 *Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi*, p. 334 (letter to Belyi, 29 Apr. 1917). A good illustration of the different approaches to the notion of wonder could be seen at the meeting of Moscow writers in March. In his speech, the realist Vikentii Veresaev called the fall of tsarism "an unexpected wonder" and voiced his anticipation of similar "wonders" in the near future. Veresaev was speaking only figuratively, having in mind the possibility of a unanimous protest on the part of Russian writers against the war and the demands for a peace without annexations and indemnities and for the right to self-determination for all nations. In spite of their for-the-moment utopian character, these goals seemed too limited in scope and vision to Belyi, Berdiaev and others, and during the intermission they blamed Veresaev for failing to understand the true nature of the coming "miracle" (V. Veresaev, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. v /Moscow, 1961/, pp. 458-9 /"Mart 1917 goda..."/).

66 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VIII, p. 479.

67 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 316. See also Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 320; *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 30 ("Moi lunnyi drug: O Bloke").

68 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 316. Blok was pleased to hear that minister Tereshchenko, before going to his first meeting with the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, had opened at random a poetry volume by Blok for inspiration. The line which the minister's finger had pointed at was "overthrow, oh overthrow" ("svergni, o, svergni"), and thus one can say that Blok, quite unintentionally, also had a role in the birth of the fateful antagonism between the Provisional Government and the Soviet, even if he himself did not interpret the lines as concerning the World War. (Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VIII, p. 484.)

of the war, and therefore a new war policy had to be worked out. Materially the army was better equipped than in 1915, but discipline was breaking up as a result of war-weariness. Hope centred on the possibility of the revolution having a reviving effect on the army's flagging spirit and on a possible German revolution, with an ensuing common front against the World War. The Allied blockade of Germany and America's entry into the war were other factors which might hasten the end of the war. Anti-war agitation was still rare, even if the abolition of censorship created conditions for a more open discussion than previously.

The first collective appeal concerning the war was issued by the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. In it the international working class was urged to rebel against the capitalists and emperors who were held to be responsible for "the slaughter". On 14 March the Petrograd Soviet adopted a declaration, based on a draft by Maksim Gor'kii,⁶⁹ calling upon the German workers to follow the Russian example and bring about a revolution. Together they could end the war through a "peace without victory", that is without annexations and indemnities. If this proposal failed to arouse support, the struggle would have to be continued, but now in defence of the revolution.

Zinaida Gippius commented on the proposals in her diary. She rejected the notion of a united European working class as unfounded, with the experience of 1914 fresh in her mind, but she found the Soviet's revolutionary defencism attractive. The war was condemned in strong terms, but the need to defend freedom, synonymous with Russian soil, to "the last drop of blood" was still not forgotten.⁷⁰ It was the split and paradox that Gippius herself had been living with since 1914 that was now publicly recognized. "For modern man there is no justification for war", she repeated in her diary,⁷¹ but all the same she felt depressed at the sight of banners with the text "Down with the war!". War in general could not be justified, but this particular war had to be accepted. Gippius tried to overcome what was in reality irreconcilable with the help of a new paradox: Only someone who had hated the war from the start and still hated it, could now support it.⁷² Such a person was Kerenskii. As a revolutionary he had been unaffected by patriotism prior to the revolution, and because

69 Alan Moorehead, *The Russian Revolution* (London, 1965), p. 166 n. 1.

70 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, pp. 315-6.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 285.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 325.

he was opposed to war on principle, he had the moral right to demand the continuation of this particular war.⁷³

One had to strive for peace, but not at any cost. If Russia unilaterally declared its withdrawal from the war – Gippius in fact anticipated the events of January 1918 – the result might be the wholesale destruction of Russia by Germany. Germany was still strong and could not possibly be interested in peace, but even so Russia had to define its peace terms and repeat them continuously in an attempt to influence general opinion in the belligerent countries. While the war could not be ended immediately, its aspect had to be altered. Russia was defending its national independence and right to exist. All claims to foreign territory had to be repudiated, as well as the slogan “war to a victorious conclusion”.⁷⁴ Gippius’ view of the latter goal had in fact already been stated in 1914: “(...) every war which ends with the complete victory of one state over another, one country over another, carries in itself the embryo of a new war, as it gives rise to national bitterness (...).”⁷⁵ With Wilhelm II still in power, there would furthermore still be the danger of a German attempt to restore autocracy in Russia, and the war therefore also had the character of a revolutionary war.⁷⁶

The inspiring spirit of the revolution was to give Russia strength to continue the war. The model was France and its revolutionary wars. This was the theme of Gippius’ poem “Young March” (“Iunyi mart”), dated 8 March:

(---)
 The curse has not yet been overcome,
 the disgrace of an unprecedented war.
 Dare! The freedom of a great country
 will help us in removing it.^{*77}

In its exalted mood, its use of a blizzard, the spring and the sun as symbols of the revolution, “Young March” did not differ from the mass of contemporary political poetry. For readers unfamiliar with Gippius’ views, the undifferentiated exhortation to defeat the war with the help of “the sword” and the vague

73 *Ibid.*, p. 329.

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 309-10.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

76 *Ibid.*, pp. 302, 309.

* “Eshche ne izzhito proklatie,/ Pozor nebyvaloi voiny./ Derzaite! Pomozhet nam sniat’ ego/ Svoboda velikoi strany.”

77 *Ibid.*, p. 146 (“Iunyi mart”).

promises of a happy outcome must have seemed unsatisfactory. For Gippius, however, the main thing was that the revolution made possible an unreserved patriotism and thus soothed her agonized inner conflict. Surprisingly, she revealed no interest in participating in the public discussion, even if she was now able to express her opinions freely.

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii was even more enthusiastic than Gippius about the Petrograd Soviet's appeal. In his article "The 14th of March" ("14 Marta"), he called the date the appeal was issued one of the greatest days of the revolution. Its words about the war as a "horrible slaughter that disgraced the whole of humankind" expressed his inner thoughts.⁷⁸ The fact that it was addressed to all the peoples of the world reinforced his conviction that the February revolution was not only an internal Russian affair, but would become an "insurrection of the world for the freedom of the world".⁷⁹ Prematurely, as it turned out, Merezhkovskii took pride in having foreseen that the worldwide war would end in a worldwide revolution. The world revolution he envisioned was naturally to be of a spiritual nature, a surge towards Godmanhood.

The war had contributed towards the transformation of Russia, and now, as it had fulfilled this momentous task, it should be ended. Merezhkovskii once again reiterated his words about the perils of nationalism, the ultimate reason behind the war:

If all nations are fighting for their national truth as something absolute, then this war is perpetual, endless, a "war of extermination", as there cannot be two absolutes – one is wiped out by the other. The endlessness of this war is the end, the self-extermination of humankind.⁸⁰

In order to end the war and transform it into a world revolution, a single, all-human truth and force was needed. The solution offered by the socialist-dominated Soviet did not satisfy Merezhkovskii. For him the uniting idea was "universalism", the concept that he had been defending all through the war, while the power that alone could renew the world was Russia. The very nature of the February revolution confirmed his belief in the all-human quality of

78 Merezhkovskii, "14 marta". Merezhkovskii complained that those who had not wanted to participate in the war had been forced to choose between being silent or hissing half-aloud "with a noose around their neck". Clearly, he included himself among those opposed to the war, even if he had refrained from denouncing the war and eventually even accepted it as an inevitability.

79 *Ibid.*

80 *Ibid.*

the Russians and eliminated his last doubts about Russian messianism. At the beginning of the war Germany had scornfully but justifiably told the Russians to liberate themselves before they started to liberate the world. Now, after the February revolution, the Russians had finally earned the right to speak out on behalf of all humankind and to act in the interests of the whole world.⁸¹

The war should be condemned, but nevertheless continued. Merezhkovskii's slogan was clear-cut: "The will for peace is a will for war." International obligations were for Merezhkovskii of even greater importance than strictly national considerations. A separate peace between Russia and Germany would be a betrayal of the Allies and the peoples of Poland, Belgium, Serbia and Armenia. Merezhkovskii had already stressed that freedom was indivisible in 1914, in connection with Belgium,⁸² and now he asserted that the Russians could not consider themselves to be completely free, until the entire world had been liberated.⁸³ Peace negotiations should be conducted, but not on the basis of war-weariness. The rifle should not be laid down, as the president of the Soviet, the Menshevik Nikolai Chkheidze, had correctly said.⁸⁴

Merezhkovskii's attitude to the Petrograd Soviet was found to be too compliant by members of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, and his article was rejected by their newspaper *Rech'*.⁸⁵ This hostile attitude was unfounded. Even if Merezhkovskii did indeed acknowledge the right of the Soviet to speak in the name of the masses, he firmly rejected its tendency to regard Russia as being divided into antagonistic classes. The revolution had been neither bourgeois, nor proletarian, but patriotic and popular. The catastrophes of the war had been caused by the autocracy, and the February revolution had emerged as an attempt to save Russia. The Soviet's appeal was therefore not enough in itself. Any official statement concerning the war should be signed by representatives of the whole of revolutionary Russia, or, more precisely, by both the Soviet and the Provisional Government.

Merezhkovskii and Gippius both considered it of great importance that the Provisional Government should define its war policy as soon as possible, since any delay would undermine its credibility and upset the balance of power. As far as the content of a governmental decree was concerned, no fundamental divergences of opinion were acceptable, as a split might have a negative effect on the front. The "unified revolution" should utter a "unified word" about the

81 *Ibid.*

82 Merezhkovskii, "Bel'giiskomu narodu", in *Kniga korol'ia Al'berta*, pp. 16-7.

83 Merezhkovskii, "14 marta".

84 *Ibid.*

85 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 321.

war.⁸⁶ Within the Provisional Government Merezhkovskii's article was read carefully by Kerenskii. On 25 March, a week after its publication, he paid a visit to report that the government was working on a declaration about the war. Merezhkovskii did not have much to add to what he had already written, but he used the opportunity to warn Kerenskii about Lenin, whose return to Russia he anticipated with dread.⁸⁷

The Provisional Government's declaration was issued shortly afterwards, on 27 March. The will to defend Russia and the revolution was asserted, as were also the right of self-determination for all nations and the need for a peace without annexations. Merezhkovskii did not comment on the declaration, but Gippius could not suppress her disappointment.⁸⁸ She found its formulations too vague, and even if it was stated that Russia sought no domination over other peoples and their territories, the question of Russia's war aims was still obscured by a reminder of Russia's obligations towards the Allies. Furthermore, nothing was said about how the army's fighting capability was to be maintained in a situation, where discipline was undermined through, for example, "the very strange 'Order No. 1'".⁸⁹ The lack of authority behind the government's words was also alarming, and indeed proved fateful in the long run.

Two weeks earlier, on 11 March, a representative group of Moscow writers had met in the Moscow Art Theatre to discuss the defence of the revolution. The issue of the war overshadowed everything else. The majority of those present, including Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Aleksei Tolstoi, Maksimilian Voloshin and Valerii Briusov, supported a continuation of the war.⁹⁰ However, there was opposition to this view. Ivan Bunin listened to the representatives of the pro-war faction in dismay, but instead of speaking out himself, he asked for the opinion of Vikentii Veresaev to be heard. Veresaev had seen the World War as a tragedy for humankind from the start, and during the winter of 1916-1917 he had frequented anti-war Social Democratic circles. He now expected the same radical spirit to be shown by the Russian intelligentsia. Its duty was to work for a quick end to the war, a peace with no annexations and indemnities, and the right of self-determination for all nations.⁹¹ The necessity for a swift peace was naturally felt by everyone present, but the problem was

86 Merezhkovskii, "14 marta".

87 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, pp. 321-2.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 325.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 296. Merezhkovskii ("14 marta") also criticized "Order No. 1" as rash and ill-considered, a decision of the kind that could jeopardize the situation at the front.

90 "Sobranie pisatelei", *Russkie vedomosti* 12.3.1917 57.

91 Veresaev, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. v, pp. 458-9.

determining *how* peace should be achieved, what should be demanded from the enemy and what attitude should be taken towards the promises made to the Allies by the tsarist regime. The divergence of opinion seemed to be ironed out in the course of the discussions, and it was decided that a joint resolution should be formulated. Representatives of both sides were chosen to compose the text.⁹² The attempt at compromise failed, and when the writers met again two days later, not one but six suggestions for a declaration were put forward.⁹³ The endeavour was abandoned without further meetings.

One of the proposals came from Valerii Briusov. In the surviving, incomplete draft he never reaches the point of explaining why the war should be continued. Instead he dwells extensively on the right of writers to speak out and to be heard on political issues. One senses an uncertainty about the authority of the Russian intelligentsia after its widespread support for the tsarist regime during the war. The public image of the symbolist poet also had to be reshaped. Briusov explained any lingering doubts about the loyalty of writers towards the interests of the people as misunderstandings caused by the wartime censorship. The February revolution was as much the realization of dreams and ideals created and nourished by Russian literature, as it was the result of the soldiers' and workers' endeavours. Sensitive as they were to the needs of the masses, writers could not be wrong in their collective statements. They did not represent a certain class or party, but constituted a national voice above all camps. Briusov's claims were no longer just those of a symbolist, but they were more in the traditional spirit of the Russian intelligentsia, tied by its loyalty towards the oppressed and aware of its social duties.

Briusov cursed war in general in words reminiscent of his speech in Moscow in July 1914: "War is always the greatest evil, war is the curse and the horror of history, a remnant of barbarity, unworthy of and a disgrace for enlightened mankind."⁹⁴ For Russia the present war was even more ruinous, as it badly needed peace in order to strengthen the freedom it had gained and to reorganize the country's social life to meet the demands of different nationalities and pressure groups. At this point Briusov's draft ends. But we can see from the poem "Freedom and War" ("Svoboda i voina") and the pamphlet *How the War Should be Ended* (*Kak prekratit' voinu*) that Briusov always counterbalanced condemnation of the war with a plea for its continuation.

92 "Sobranie pisatelei", *Russkie vedomosti* 12.3.1917. See also "Sobranie pisatelei", *Utro Rossii* 12.3.1917 69.

93 "Moskovskie pisateli i revoliutsiia", *Utro Rossii* 15.3.1917 71.

94 *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: Valerii Briusov*, vol. 85, p. 216 ("Proekt Vozzvaniia moskovskikh pisatelei").

How did this correspond with the anti-war pathos of “The Thirtieth Month”, written only two months earlier? Even if the poem was still unpublished and Briusov was thus not tied by the opinions uttered in it, the sharp conflict needs clarification. In “The Thirtieth Month” Briusov had expressed his bitterness at the failure of the World War to fulfill the dreams of 1914. The February revolution offered the possibility for a revival of those original goals. In the poem “Freedom and War”, dated 22 March, Briusov appealed to the conscience of revolutionary Russia: victory should not be celebrated until all peoples were free. The fettered peoples – the Poles, Belgians, Serbs and Armenians each had one heart-breaking stanza devoted to them – were expecting to receive help from the Russians. Without enquiring into the actual condition of the Russian army, Briusov joined Merezhkovskii in putting international obligations above what he saw as “national egoism”. The poem “Freedom and War” confirms that it was not pacifism, but rather frustration at an endless war of attrition that lay behind the radicalism of “The Thirtieth Month”. The amazing success of the February revolution raised hopes that a similar “miracle” could also occur at the front and thus break the deadlock. Revolutionary enthusiasm could make people more sensitive to the idealism of 1914 and thus add strength to the Russian war effort.

Whatever reasons Briusov had for supporting the war again, it was nevertheless thoughtless of him to have “The Thirtieth Month” published in June 1917. He is said to have waited until the very last moment before giving the editorial board permission to publish the poem,⁹⁵ perhaps realizing that the situation had changed radically since January. Not only did the message of the poem differ from his present opinions, but it also contradicted his stance at the March meeting, his poem “Freedom and War” and his forthcoming pamphlet *How the War Should be Ended*. While Briusov had claimed in “The Thirtieth Month” that the cause of “the enslaved people” was lost and that the war could therefore no longer be justified, he was now emphasizing that obligations towards the oppressed were still in force and that consequently the war had to be continued. The fact that Briusov chose to give “The Thirtieth Month” to Maksim Gor’kii’s socialist newspaper *Novaia zhizn’* further emphasized the ill-timed anti-war pathos of the poem. The moment for publishing the poem was also badly chosen, as the Kerenskii offensive – a last desperate attempt to bring about a breakthrough at the front, and as such tacitly supported by Briusov – was about to start.

What had been radical in early 1917 could be interpreted as opportunistic six months later. “The Thirtieth Month” did attract criticism, but apparently

95 Il’inskii, p. 656.

not so much on account of its content as because it was written by Briusov. This time Briusov set about devising an apology, "A Few Words About Myself" ("Neskol'ko slov o sebe"), in which he planned to point out that "The Thirtieth Month" had been written before *Novaia zhizn'* began to be published and that he had been invited to participate in such a socialist organ precisely because of his opinions. He also wanted to reserve for himself, as a "thinking person", the right to alter his opinions, a right that he had been defending ever since the turn of the century. If he had perceived "cheerful calls" at the beginning of the war and had rejoiced at the inherent possibilities of the war ("Posledniaia voina"), these voices had later grown weaker.⁹⁶ What Briusov failed to mention was that after the February revolution he had in fact claimed to hear the same "calls" again.

Briusov did not publish his attempt at self-defence. Provoked by the personal attacks he was subjected to, he chose to present his view on the issues raised by the war at greater length. The pamphlet *How the War Should be Ended* was published in August in an impressive edition of 50,000 copies. The preface appears to have been written in May, after the formation of the first coalition government but before the Kerenskii offensive, which in fact came like an answer to Briusov's plea. *How the War Should be Ended*, a unique political document among Briusov's works, was not a neutral comment, but, as the title indicates, a straightforward attempt to influence public opinion on a topical issue.

Briusov began by strongly condemning the war, both as an abstract notion and as a concrete historical phenomenon, in fact repeating the words he had used at the banquet in 1914 and the writers' meeting in March 1917. Three years of war were long enough to prove the impossibility of one side crushing the other and attaining their goals by military means. As far as Russia was concerned, it was in acute need of peace after the February revolution. No elections to a Constituent Assembly – the next step of the revolution – could be held while the war continued, as millions of soldiers and prisoners of war would in that case be prevented from casting their votes. Briusov therefore concluded:

Thus the whole life of Russia, all its interests, both near and far, tell us about one and the same thing. Everything comes down to one thing: what we need first and foremost, more than anything else, is peace! The war has to be ended as soon as possible, a peace has to be concluded as

96 Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. II, pp. 446-7 (comm. to "Tridtsatyi mesiats").

soon as possible; that would be for the good of Russia, that would be the guarantee of our freedom!⁹⁷

In spite of these persuasive words in favour of peace, Briusov still found a continuation of the war necessary. The central thought of his pamphlet was crystallized in the Latin saying “*Si vis pacem – para bellum*”, a thought close to Merezhkovskii’s slogan “The will for peace is a will for war”. A just and lasting peace could, paradoxically, only be reached and secured through a continuation of the war. Briusov was not prepared – as his poem “Freedom and War” had also shown – to abandon occupied nations like the Belgians, Poles and Serbs, which thirsted for freedom and independence. Italy and Romania were in need of military assistance, the population of Alsace and Lorraine was striving for unification with France, the Armenians were threatened by the Turks, and oppressed Slav brothers in Austria-Hungary were looking to Russia for help. An immediate peace meant deserting these people and their aspirations. The bitter accusations of “The Thirtieth Month” was repeated: Russia’s original, supposedly unselfish wish to defend the rights of small and oppressed nationalities had been abandoned or turned into “meaningless formulations”.⁹⁸

But even if one forgot “the beautiful dreams associated with the idea of the self-determination of peoples”, an immediate separate peace still did not, according to Briusov, coincide with the national interests of Russia. As Russia was weak at present, Germany would be able to dictate the peace terms. It was sure to demand the annexation of Poland and parts of the Baltic lands, a protectorate over Constantinople and the Straits,⁹⁹ heavy war indemnities and a favourable trade treaty. The most Russia could hope to retain would be its 1914 borders, with the exception of Poland. Such a “disgraceful peace” would have a negative effect, not only upon Russia’s economic life, but also upon its political life: “If the free Russian state begins its existence with military disasters and a burdensome peace, this will have a profound influence on the psychology of the whole population of Russia, and most of all on her millions

97 Valerii Briusov, *Kak prekratit’ voinu* (Moscow, 1917), p. 10.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 20. Briusov added that it could have been in the interest of the tsarist regime to inspire noble sentiments and idealism, while keeping the real goals of the war secret. He refrained from mentioning that he had himself supported the “secret”, imperialist goals of the war.

99 Briusov proposed that, as Constantinople obviously would not become the Russian Tsar’grad, it should instead be declared a neutral harbour to which Russia would have free passage (*ibid.*, p. 30). This alternative had been mentioned already in the nineteenth century, but the Slavophiles had always proudly rejected it then.

of peasants.”¹⁰⁰ Such a peace could lead to the dissolution of Russia, a civil war and a possible victory for reactionary forces through a German-led restoration of the Romanov dynasty.

Another obstacle to an immediate peace were the demands of the Allies. Russia was tied, if not legally, then at least morally, by agreements and obligations towards France and England. A separate peace would leave Germany with one less front, and it could then concentrate all its forces on the Western Front. The Allied Powers could justifiably interpret a separate peace as a hostile and treacherous act and take revenge by leaving Russia to the mercy of Germany. A peace could therefore only be concluded with the approval of the Allies. Briusov still stressed the need to continue Russian peace initiatives. Within Germany the demands for peace were bound to grow stronger, as the economic crisis caused by the blockade deepened, and the military strength of the Allied Powers increased as a result of America's entry into the war. The day when Germany would be forced to accept a peace that was advantageous for the Allies, including Russia, was therefore close at hand. Like Gippius, Briusov rejected the slogan “war to a victorious conclusion”, as he – erroneously – assumed that Germany would accept a peace before it had been defeated militarily. His speculations were also based on the assumption that both sides had by now realized that no decisive military victory could be achieved.

In spite of the gloomy situation, peace was thus, according to Briusov, within reach, and Russia had only to hold out until that moment arrived. Even if the Russian army was not able to defeat the enemy, the German offensive had to be stopped. Every inch of soil that was surrendered would be to the advantage of the enemy in the coming peace negotiations. Russia had to defend itself and, if possible, recapture lost territory. Even an offensive could be accepted, as an offensive was sometimes the best defence. A continuation of the war made great demands upon Russian society and the army. Briusov's proposals for how Russia should regain its military strength could have served as a model for General Lavr Kornilov and Boris Savinkov in their forthcoming national salvation programme. “Dual power” had to be rejected and all political power concentrated in the hands of the Provisional Government. The formation of a coalition government was a necessary and welcome step. The Supreme Military Council was to be given full powers. The army, navy and airforce had to be strengthened, military discipline imposed on the railways, new cadres of officers and soldiers trained. Strong discipline was needed in the army, and all activities that led to the collapse of discipline were to be declared counter-revolutionary and treasonable. Briusov called upon other Rus-

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

sian writers to join him in a propaganda campaign: "To promote the maintenance of a strong central power is the duty of every citizen in our days. To call for this, at the top of one's voice, is the duty of every Russian writer."¹⁰¹

Briusov was not the only Russian writer to rally around the Provisional Government and ask for a more consistent war policy, but few expressed their convictions as unconditionally. The curious thing is that despite this Briusov's pamphlet appears to have received no attention whatsoever. In spite of its huge print-run and the author's *renommé*, it was largely ignored by the press, and many of Briusov's colleagues seem to have been unaware of its very existence. Briusov was himself partly responsible, as he did not pursue his campaign. The futility of supporting a weak government and the prospect of being linked with the Kornilov affair and its counter-revolutionary aura apparently made him decide to withdraw from politics in the late summer of 1917.

Fedor Sologub supported the continuation of the war in words reminiscent of Merezhkovskii. Even though the war had led up to the February revolution, it had not thereby been deprived of meaning. The war was not only to transform Russian life, but also to create a bright future for the whole of mankind. It was totally to renew man's "inert, stagnant everyday life" and turn the ideal of the brotherhood of peoples into reality.¹⁰² Nor had Sologub rejected the thought that, through the readiness for sacrifice that it presupposed and the suffering that it caused, the war would ennoble human character and bring forward a revolution of the spirit. The universal cause which Russia had taken upon itself also spoke for a continuation of the war until decisive victory over Germany.¹⁰³ One of Russia's roles was to be a liberator,¹⁰⁴ and to withdraw from the war meant abandoning the small European nations, whose very existence was threatened by the Central Powers.

A separate peace appeared to be impossible, as the victorious Germans could not have any interest in signing a peace treaty, as long as their goals in the East, as Sologub interpreted them, were so far from being attained. Sologub's strongest argument for a continuation of the war was the indisputable fact that the German armies had penetrated deep into the Russian Empire and were threatening to make further conquests.¹⁰⁵ In a poem of March 1917, Sologub wrote: "The Teutonic sword is ready/ to fall with a heavy blow/ in a gigantic sweep/ over our firm Dvinsk." ("Gotov tevtonskii mech/ V razmakhe is-

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁰² Sologub, "Derzanie do kontsa".

¹⁰³ Sologub, "Derzanie do kontsa"; Sologub, "Nabliudeniia i mecht'y o teatre", p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Sologub, *Voina*, p. 5 ("Gimn").

¹⁰⁵ Fedor Sologub, "Drevniaia istoriia: Razgovor", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 7.9.1917 16429.

polinskom/ Udarom tiazhkim lech'/ Nad nashim krepkim Dvinskom").¹⁰⁶ At a moment when "haughty" Hindenburg was throwing "greedy glances" at Petrograd, Russians could not just hope passively for a German revolution or peace negotiations, but had to continue their military resistance.

Only now is it possible to feel genuine patriotism, Konstantin Bal'mont claimed after the February revolution. Nothing indicates that he would really have found it difficult to be a patriot during the war, even if at times he seemed to be moved more by aversion for Germany than by a tangible love for Russia. Nevertheless, his renewed faith in the Russian people and the notion of a democratic Russia did present Bal'mont with new arguments for a continuation of the war. Russia was now defending its freedom and the achievements of the revolution. Bal'mont also repeated that only a military victory by the Allied Powers would secure a lasting peace, and in this sense the World War was a war against war.¹⁰⁷ He did not even raise the possibility of a separate peace, as he was convinced that the German threat could not be overcome through negotiation.¹⁰⁸ Germany not only presented a danger to the Russian revolution, but it remained, as Bal'mont had repeatedly said during the war, the enemy of freedom in general. In essence it had not changed. "Arrogantly" it saw only itself, lived on lies, and through its army it brought terror and "destruction in the name of destruction". Knowing this, Russia could not desert its allies and the occupied peoples of Lithuania, Poland, Belgium and Serbia. In defending itself Russia was also performing a mission of liberation, as Bal'mont says in his revolutionary poem, "A Spring Call" ("Vesennii klich"):

And if there is still a bulwark
where the imprisoning power is secure,
arm in arm toward the enemy,
in us the will to action sings.
Forward, soul! And the sword, forward!*

Additional strength could be gained from the thought that a "honourable peace" was not far away ("K rodnomu narodu").¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Tsekhnovitser, p. 354.

¹⁰⁷ Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 42 ("Solnechnaia ugroza").

¹⁰⁸ In the poem "Mech" Bal'mont writes, "Nuzhen mech, tol'ko mech" (Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 28).

* "A esli est eshche oplot,/ Gde moshch' tiuremnaia tuga,/ Ruka s rukoiu – na vraga,/ V nas volia deistviiia poët./ Vpered, dusha! I mech, vpered!"

¹⁰⁹ Bal'mont, "Vesennii klich".

¹¹⁰ Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 35 ("K rodnomu narodu").

Unity was a central notion for Bal'mont. The same phrase – “In unity there is strength” – is repeated both in his poem “Unity” (“Edinenie”)¹¹¹ and the article “The Sun’s Threat” (“Solnechnaia ugroza”).¹¹² Unity was needed primarily to bring about a successful conclusion to the war. Praising the army as one of the forces behind the February revolution, Bal'mont simultaneously emphasized the need for strong internal bonds within the army. Considering the actual situation in the army at this time, Bal'mont’s words in “Praise to the Soldiers” (“Slava soldatam”) about the brotherhood between officers and soldiers had a false ring. The poem was apparently intended to be a marching song for the army of democratic Russia, but its main function in the spring of 1917 was to remind the soldiers and officers of their duty. The word “honour” (“chest”) was used as much to mean an obligation as a tribute.¹¹³

Bal'mont’s most forceful expression of the necessity for unity and a continued war-effort was “To All” (“Vsem”), published on 31 March. The February revolution had not substantially changed his image of the war. In the poem, Russia stands for freedom and equality, while Germany lives off oppression. Both are “knights”, but the German “knight” has long ago betrayed his honour:

The danger is one. Unite.
 Two wills in the heart make one misfortune.
 The German knight and the Russian hero
 define themselves once and for all.
 The German knight, the German warrior,
 is no less fearless in battle than us.
 Victory’s for those who are worthy of it,
 who are at one with their brother till their last hour.
 May we not become separated.
 The war calls workers to the machine.
 For us, fate prepares the honour of a fight,
 soldier against soldier, bayonet against bayonet.
 The German knight is no longer a knight:
 he is a black kite and he loves the yoke.
 But the Russian warrior desires liberty;
 he rushes forward for freedom.
 What is Russia? Fields. Villages.

111 K. Bal'mont, *Pesnia rabocheho molota* (Moscow, 1922). “Edinenie” is dated 4 March 1917.

112 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 41 (“V edinenii sila!”).

113 K. Bal'mont, “Slava soldatam”, *Utro Rossii* 12.3.1917 69.

What is Russia? Forests. Meadows.
 We are all equal in it. And an ancient voice
 orders us to fight as one against the enemy.
 Spring calls us: unite.
 The entire globe looks to the Russians.
 May our grey hero win victory,
 and may all who are able prepare for battle.^{*114}

Bal'mont was more outspoken here than elsewhere about the existing threats to national unity. "Two wills in the heart" was a reference to the "dual power", the split between the Provisional Government and the Soviet, but it could also be read as criticism of the war opposition. In the article "The Sun's Threat", written in early May, but only published in September,¹¹⁵ Bal'mont demanded "one will in a Great Country", comparing Russia's inner split to the catastrophe that would occur if the sun's rays set themselves free from their source, the sun. He added in a threatening tone: "He who is against this will is either a madman or a criminal, either a blind man or a traitor."¹¹⁶ Bal'mont was openly urging the authorities to take strong measures against those agitating against the war and undermining the common will to victory.

In a poem of early March, "The Poet at the Gathering", Viacheslav Ivanov wrote in alarm that "the Christ-child", or the spirit of the February revolution,

* "Odna opasnost'. Soedinites'./ Dve voli v serdtse – odna beda./ Nemetskii rytsar' i russkii vitiaz'/ Sebia oznachat – i navsegda./ Nemetskii rytsar', nemetskii voin/ Besstrashny v bitve ne men'she nas./ Dlia tekhn pobedy, kto ikh dostoin,/ Kto družhen s bratom v svoi krainyi chas.// Da ne vpadem zhe v raz'edinen'e./ Rabochikh klichet voina k stanku./ Sud'ba gotovit nam chest' srazheniia,/ Soldat k soldatu, i shtyk k shtyku./ Nemetskii rytsar' – ne rytsar' bole,/ On chernyi korshun i liubit gnet./ A russkii voin zhelaet voli,/ On za svobodu idet vpered.// Chto est' Rossiia? Polia. Derevni./ Chto est' Rossiia? Lesa. Luga./ My vse v nei ravny. I golos drevnii/ Velit nam družno srazhat' vraga./ Vesna nam klichet: Soedinites'./ Na russkikh smotrit ves' shar zemnoi./ Da pobedit zhe nash seryi vitiaz',/ I vse, kto mozhet, gotov'tes' v boi."

114 K. Bal'mont, "Vsem", *Russkoe slovo* 31.3.1917 72.

115 "Solnechnaia ugroza" had originally been offered to a Kharkov newspaper in connection with Bal'mont's visit to the town in May. It was not published then, because the editorial board, according to Bal'mont, did not want to offend local "democratic organizations". In *Revoliutsioner ia ili net* (pp. 40-3) Bal'mont used italics to highlight the passages that the Kharkov editors had wished to censor. As far as can be judged, it was his slavophile vein and harsh words about Germany that evoked displeasure, possibly because such sentiments were seen to conflict with the efforts towards an immediate peace.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

was under threat. Herod's warriors wanted its life, and an abyss had been dug by the side of the cradle. One had to be prepared for a fight:

Gird yourselves with the whole world for battle,
lock in your spirit the fire of the banners –
and beware of celebrating in advance
the final verdict of time!^{*117}

The most serious menace to the revolution was neglect of the war. Ivanov could praise freedom and peace, but what was urgently needed was unity and consent in the face of the external threat.

The same thought was repeated in "Forward, You Free People" ("Vpered, narod svobodnyi"), a poem of May 1917, which gives the impression of having been written as the text for a military march. Three arguments for a continuation of the war – well-known from the other symbolists – were presented: parts of Russia were occupied, the enemy was threatening the freedom of the revolution, and freedom had no value as long as "the hungry have not satisfied their hunger". Connected with the motif of Russia's international obligations was the longing for a worldwide upheaval. The war had to be fought "As long as your hearth is trampled upon/ and no brother's flag shows red/ on the enemy stronghold" ("Dokole popran tvoi ochag/ I bratskii ne aleet flag/ Na vrazheskoi tverdye").¹¹⁸ If the two first stanzas of "Forward, You Free People" expressed the need to rally the forces, then the last stanza could even be read as supporting a military offensive.

The tone has grown more desperate by "In Times of Trouble" ("V smutnuiu godinu"), dated Sochi 21 May. Ivanov blames his countrymen for their carefree celebration of the revolution at a time when the enemy, the Adversary, was advancing and the native soil still had to be defended. If military force could not be trusted, an "invisible spiritual wall" had to be raised by divine power in defence of Russia:

There is armour cast
on the native soul;
it has an invisible Leader:

* "Vsem mirom prepoiash'tes' k brani,/ Zamknite v dukh ogni znamen –/ I boites' prazdnovat' zarane/ Poslednii prigovor vremen!"

117 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 58 ("Poet na skhodke").

118 *Ibid.*, p. 61 ("Vpered narod svobodnyi").

in times of trouble and ruin
 I have faith in and pray to
 Christ and the Spirit.*¹¹⁹

Russia's virtue was that, even at times of national degradation, it remained a tireless seeker of "the truth of God", and in this lay the pledge of its ultimate salvation and victory.

Of the symbolists, Andrei Belyi and Aleksandr Blok had definitely left the pro-war camp. Belyi had initially shared Gippius' and Merezhkovskii's admiration for Kerenskii, seeing him as the embodiment of "the new man".¹²⁰ Kerenskii is only mentioned in the brochure *Revolution and Culture*, where a line is quoted from a speech that the newly-appointed Minister of War made in the Bolshoi Theatre in May: "Let us be romantics!" Belyi seems to have interpreted the utterance as an affirmation of his own thoughts about the primacy of the revolution of the spirit, and his answer to the invitation was therefore an enthusiastic, "We will, we will."¹²¹ For his part Kerenskii was perhaps referring to Merezhkovskii's play about the young Bakunin, *Romantics (Romantiki)*, of 1916, where "romantic" stood for a believer in the ultimate victory of revolution and freedom in spite of prevailing difficulties.

Disillusion came early for Belyi. In an unpublished autobiographical sketch, written in the mid-twenties, he claims that he had lost faith in the Provisional Government by May 1917. It was its "ambiguous" war policy that made him turn to Lenin, whose outspoken anti-war stance aroused his sympathy for, as he puts it, a "social revolution".¹²² This statement of loyalty smacks strongly of opportunism, an accusation levelled at Belyi in the 1920's.¹²³ On the other hand, there are some indications that in 1917, no matter how aloof he was from politics and how critical he was of Marxism, Belyi was in practice close to the radical Left. He did nurse strong anti-war feelings, and the ambiguity of the Provisional Government's position was a fact, as it was working for peace by

* "Est' bron'ia litaia/ Na dushe rodimoj, / Est' ei Vozhd' nezrimyi: / V smutu i razrukhu / Ia Khristu i Dukhu / Veriu i molius".

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62 ("V smutnuiu godinu").

¹²⁰ Nikolai Berdiaev, *Samopoznanie: Opyt filosofskoi avtobiografii* (Paris, 1983), p. 263, n. Berdiaev recalls in his memoirs how Belyi, in his typical fashion, accompanied his declaration of love for Kerenskii with something that looked like a dance (p. 224).

¹²¹ Belyi, *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*, p. 18.

¹²² Tsezar' Vol'pe, "O poezii Andreia Belogo", in Andrei Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia* (Leningrad, 1940), p. 40.

¹²³ D. Maksimov, *Russkie poety nachala veka* (Leningrad, 1986), p. 363.

waging war and was still linked to the Allied Powers and their war aims. While others, like Briusov, Merezhkovskii and Gippius, admitted the contradictory basis of the situation, but still saw no alternative to war, Belyi's aversion for the war had become uncompromising. He rejected the politics of the Provisional Government, presumably including the Kerenskii offensive, as "mistakes",¹²⁴ and in a letter at the end of the year he wrote: "I hate the war: all vileness comes from it; it is true that I feel myself more and more a follower of Tolstoi as far as the war issue is concerned (...)." ¹²⁵ Belyi was not so much moved by compassion for the suffering Russian people, as rather by an awareness of the senselessness of the continuing bloodshed, since it no longer promised to promote the spiritual progress of mankind.

By May Belyi was already far to the left of the Provisional Government. In *Revolution and Culture* he not only rejected the February revolution as "bourgeois", but also advocated radical reforms of the means of production as a way of promoting a future social revolution. He annoyed Merezhkovskii and Gippius, who had returned to the Caucasus in the spring of 1917, by sending them letters full of praise for the Social Democrats.¹²⁶ His two closest friends at this time, the historian and literary critic Ivanov-Razumnik and Sergei Mstislavskii, a member of the Petrograd Soviet's military commission, were both close to the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Belyi later wrote that he shared the views of Ivanov-Razumnik on war and revolution,¹²⁷ but Mstislavskii, an opponent of the war and an advocate of the formation of a purely socialist government,¹²⁸ also seems to have been influential on Belyi's political development.

Belyi found a natural affinity with the Scythians, a group of intellectual revolutionaries, including Ivanov-Razumnik, who believed that because of its dynamic, maximalistic qualities and insatiable spiritual thirst, Russia was destined to fulfil a messianic role in history, bridging the gulf between East and West, saving the world through an act of self-sacrifice and leading mankind to a new historical era. Russian messianism had inspired other symbolists earlier, but it could only attract Belyi in a form cleansed of Christianity and any acceptance of the war. At the Moscow meeting in March he had still felt agitated by the loss of discipline in the army, describing how roughly officers

¹²⁴ Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, p. 103.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Dolgopолов, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman 'Peterburg'*, p. 367.

¹²⁶ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 31.

¹²⁷ Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, p. 103.

¹²⁸ William G. Rosenberg, "Introduction: S.D. Mstislavskii and the Russian Revolution", in Sergei Mstislavskii, *Five Days which Transformed Russia* (Bloomington, 1988), p. 6.

had been treated by the soldiers in Petrograd,¹²⁹ but now the destruction and chaos brought forth by the war and revolution began to appear as necessary purifying forces.

Aleksandr Blok had also grown tired of the war. Unfortunate and exhausting for Russia, it had lost any positive aspects in his eyes, something that the February revolution could not alter. Blok was now in favour of immediate peace, even if that meant deserting the Allied Powers. He did not defend his opinion publicly, but he was prepared to vote against the war “with his feet”. Before his leave had come to an end, he had made up his mind not to return to the Pinsk marshes.¹³⁰ The idle and boring life at the front, with its waste of money, time and lives had grown into a symbol of war’s absurdity. When Blok was ordered to present himself for duty, he tried to get an exemption through his acquaintance Tereshchenko, the minister. They had dinner together in early April,¹³¹ and later Blok wrote a letter, informing Tereshchenko of his intolerable situation. Blok cautiously refrained from articulating any anti-war feelings and only dismissed his work for the Union of Zemstvos and Towns as useless. On the other hand, he saw no alternatives for himself within the army: “I am not able to be a private soldier; it is probably too late to enter a military school, and I very much doubt whether I could become a useful officer.”¹³²

Tereshchenko, who was to succeed Pavel Miliukov as Minister of Foreign Affairs in a few weeks time, did not react to Blok’s implied request to be exempted from military service. Instead, Vladimir Piast arranged for Blok to stay in Petrograd as secretary of an investigatory commission that the Provisional Government had set up to examine the activities of former tsarist officials and court dignitaries. Blok took up his new duties on 8 May, while formally still in the service of the Unions of Zemstvos and Towns. The interrogations took place in the Winter Palace, and on one occasion Kerenskii turned up to observe the commission’s work. Blok had not known him previously, but he perceived the “halo of glory” around the man, who more than anyone else personified the Russian revolution.¹³³ The two men did not speak, but Kerenskii must have been favourably disposed towards Blok, as he seems to have ensured that the poet and “some Jews” were not affected by a new law which would otherwise have sent Blok to the front along with the other reservists.¹³⁴

129 Veresaev, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. v, p. 457.

130 *Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi*, p. 333 (letter to Belyi, 27 Apr. 1917).

131 *Pis'ma Aleksandra Bloka k rodnym*, vol. II, p. 345.

132 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 319.

133 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VIII, p. 498.

134 *Ibid.*, p. 495; Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, pp. 346-7.

When Blok called for an immediate end to the war, he did not speculate on whether Germany was prepared to conclude peace, or what a peace treaty on German terms would mean. His opposition to the war was based on feelings and not on tactical or political considerations. "Inwardly the war has ended. When will it end outwardly?", he wrote in his notebook.¹³⁵ The war had not cleared the air, as Blok had thought it would in 1914, but it had instead become the culmination of all "the lies, dirt and vileness" of the old, pre-war world.¹³⁶ The war was a lie, Blok kept repeating, and those who supported it became part of that lie. He saw Fedor Sologub as an especially inveterate liar,¹³⁷ and he bluntly turned down Sologub's invitations to contribute to a publication in support of the national war loan and to appear at a writers' meeting at the Academy of Arts. Blok was also prepared to erase his own earlier involvement in the war. Looking back at the war years, he summarized his own activities in a deliberately distorted fashion: "If I am asked, what I did during the Great War, I shall be able to answer that I did something worthwhile: edited the works of Ap[ollon] Grigor'ev, staged 'The Rose and the Cross' ('Roza i Krest') and wrote 'Retribution' ('Vozmezdie')."¹³⁸

A prolongation of the war could only have disastrous consequences. In 1917 Blok was gradually widening his scope, turning from a "nationalist" into an "internationalist", according to the terminology of the time. Just when the majority of the symbolists were becoming more and more emotionally involved in the question of Russia's survival, Blok felt worried about the future of European culture. "Every additional day of war deprives us of culture", he wrote in his notebook.¹³⁹ If the war did not end, then *nemesis* would follow. Also his old fear of "the Yellow Peril" had been aroused again: "Just let Europe go on fighting, that wretched, debauched coquette: all the wisdom of the world will run out through her fingers, soiled with the war and politics, and others will come, and lead her 'where she does not want to go'. Perhaps it will be the yellow people."¹⁴⁰ Here, as in the draft of the poem "The Petrograd sky grew dim with rain..." of 1914, Blok was foreshadowing the thought that he would give its final form in his 1918 poem "Scythians" ("Skify"). Russia was Europe's shield against the East, now conceived as an ethnic entity, and in a Russia weakened by war, the Huns of today could not be held back. Russia, too, would reveal its

¹³⁵ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 317.

¹³⁶ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VI, p. 10.

¹³⁷ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 329.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

¹⁴⁰ *Pis'ma Aleksandra Bloka k rodnym*, pp. 348-9 (letter to his mother, 17 Apr. 1917).

Asiatic, Scythian face, if its call for brotherhood and its love for Europe did not meet any response. The result would be the destruction of European culture. An immediate end to the internal war was therefore a vital necessity.¹⁴¹

After the February revolution, Blok had complained about the difficulty he had in orienting himself in the Russian political situation.¹⁴² Now a sense of comprehension was growing. Just as he had earlier “felt the war”,¹⁴³ he now claimed “to feel the present moment”. What was happening in Russia was in the spirit of *his* forebodings. The only political party that spoke the same language as he did was the Bolshevik Party, but it was as yet unthinkable to link himself publicly with Lenin. Blok’s hatred of the war and his fear of the Eastern threat were as yet known only to his closest friends and his notebook.

Russia in Deep Crisis

In June 1917, the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets was held in Petrograd. Aleksandr Blok was present on 16 June, when his superiors in the investigatory commission gave a report on the progress of their work. In his diary Blok noted with satisfaction that the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, Nikolai Chkheidze, made it clear to a visiting American socialist that the only way for the Allied Powers to help Russia was to hasten the end of the war.¹⁴⁴ Blok failed to mention the second part of Chkheidze’s argument, namely that the war could only be ended by victory for Russia and its allies. Blok was of a radically different opinion. Sometime during the summer he confessed to his friend Piast that he was prepared to accept even “the most ignominious peace”.¹⁴⁵ What the consequences of such a peace might be, he refrained from pondering.

Holding such opinions, Blok came close to the Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, who formed an opposition grouping at the congress. The majority of delegates supported the Provisional Government’s war policy, including a strengthening of the army and the granting of full authority to Aleksandr Kerenskii, the Minister of War, in all questions concerning national defence. They also gave their support to the offensive that was launched on 18 June. Initial military successes prompted optimism, but after only two weeks the operation ground to a halt. The soldiers started to desert en masse,

¹⁴¹ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VIII, p. 487.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 476.

¹⁴³ *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 89, p. 332 (letter to his wife, 6 Oct. 1914).

¹⁴⁴ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 263.

¹⁴⁵ *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniiaakh sovremennikov*, vol. I, p. 395 (V. Piast).

abandoning loyal officers and troops. The final collapse of the offensive occurred at Tarnopol' on 6 July, when the front was opened up to the enemy by panic-stricken Russian troops. The soldiers were war-weary and poorly motivated, but the Bolsheviks with their anti-war agitation were also seen to have played a provocative role in the dissolution of the Russian army.

Konstantin Bal'mont commented on the battle of Tarnopol' in a bitter poem, "Betrayal" ("Izmena"):

(---)
 Just the word alone,
 just the sound – Tarnopol',
 is a dagger in our back,
 a slap in our face.

And these are brothers.
 And we should be dear to them.
 For them even the yoke
 of captivity is welcome.
 An eternal curse
 on those, low and base,
 for whom betrayal
 is like heady mead.*¹⁴⁶

Bal'mont's disillusionment was profound. Tarnopol' was not only a military defeat, but also a moral one. By refusing to fight, the deserters had turned their backs on the legacy of their fathers, and broken the word given to Russia's allies.¹⁴⁷ Such concepts as soldier, discipline, honour and duty had been deprived of their meaning. The army had turned into a "herd", a metaphor indicating a metamorphosis of human beings into beasts. The officers and soldiers who had been abandoned on the battlefield became Christ figures in Bal'mont's eyes, despised by their own and forced to wear the crown of thorns even though they had given their lives for others ("Boevym orlam").¹⁴⁸ As to the soldiers who had refused to obey what Bal'mont called "the Supreme Will

* "(...) Odno lish' slovo,/ Lish' zvuk – Tarnopol',/ Kinzhal nam v spinu,/ Udar v litso./ I eto – brat'ia,/ I k nim – byt' blizkim./ Im dazhe plena/ Zhelanen gnet./ Navek proklat'e/ Tem podlo-nizkim,/ Komu izmena/ Kak p'iani med."

¹⁴⁶ Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, pp. 44-5 ("Izmena").

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-2 ("Solnechnaia ugroza").

¹⁴⁸ K. Bal'mont, "Boevym orlam", *Utro Rossii* 27.9.1917 232.

of the people”, they deserved to be treated like enemies.¹⁴⁹ Bal'mont wrote declamatory lines that the Provisional Government could have found use for in its attempts to restore the army's fighting capacity:

In the name of free Russia, in the name of the sanctity of our Motherland, in the name of Land and Freedom, in the name of human dignity, in the name of an honest and not a shameful life, soldiers – off into the battle, and he who does not want to fight for his native land, deserves to die.¹⁵⁰

A direct result of Tarnopol' was the restoration of the death penalty at the front. This decision was applauded not only by Bal'mont, but also by Gippius, as a necessary step for the salvation of Russia. Gippius, who long before had expressed the need for an offensive aimed at recapturing lost Russian soil,¹⁵¹ equated desertion to egoism. The mutinous soldiers were led not by conscience and consciousness, but merely by instinct, and the only way of stopping them was to make them realize that if they advanced they might be killed, but if they retreated, death would be inevitable.¹⁵²

The July uprising was the first attempt at a counter-revolution. In her diary Gippius welcomed the suppression of the revolt, but at the same time saw it as a warning example of the government's tendency to act belatedly. She had her doubts about the efficiency of “the colourless, honourable, cultivated and powerless (non-revolutionary)” Provisional Government,¹⁵³ but her belief in Kerenskii, now Prime Minister, was still intact. Not only did he possess intelligence and a revolutionary spirit, but he also had extraordinary intuition. As the only prominent politician to be on neither side of the “dual power” but solely on the side of the revolution, he could serve as a bridge-builder between the Provisional Government and the Soviet. His task was to merge the “evolutionary creative” force of the liberals and the “revolutionary destructive” force of the Left into a true “revolutionary creative” power.¹⁵⁴

Gippius kept her support for Kerenskii to herself. For the time being she had not only abandoned fiction, but also journalism. Once back in Kislovodsk in April, the Merezhkovskii's stayed out of the debate. Their only involvement in politics while they were in the Caucasus was when they once took part in a

¹⁴⁹ Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 30 (“Dostoin smert”).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁵¹ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, pp. 329-30.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 335.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

soirée for the so-called Freedom Loan.¹⁵⁵ Another symbolist who participated in the same campaign was Sologub, who advertised the national war loan on Nevskii Prospekt in Petrograd. Blok expressed dismay at Sologub's action in his diary.¹⁵⁶

The Moscow State Conference on 12-15 August was an attempt to rally patriotic support for the Provisional Government after the summer's catastrophes. Accepting the need to consolidate all democratic forces, Sologub welcomed the conference as one of the last rays of hope for Russia.¹⁵⁷ If the fate of the revolution had so far been considered more important than the fate of Russia, the conference delegates appeared to understand the need for a new policy. However, the assembly did not produce any concrete results, as the more sceptical Gippius noted, but only revealed the powerlessness of the government.¹⁵⁸ For many Kerenskii's speech was a disappointment, as he chose to hail the revolution with worn-out phrases, instead of taking a firm stand on the dangers of the current moment. He favoured revolution and freedom over Russia, regardless of the situation.

The so-called "August Crisis" was ripening in the shadow of the Moscow State Conference. Gippius and Merezhkovskii, who had returned from the Caucasus in early August, could follow the crisis from close up, since two of its protagonists – Kerenskii and Boris Savinkov – belonged to their circle of friends. Gippius had felt great respect for the writer and Socialist Revolutionary terrorist Savinkov ever since their time together as émigrés in Paris. After the February revolution Savinkov had at first worked as Commissar for the Provisional Government at the front, until he was appointed Deputy War Minister on 26 July. The news that Savinkov had become Kerenskii's assistant was greeted with satisfaction by Gippius, while she was in Kislovodsk.¹⁵⁹

Immediately upon the Merezhkovskiis' return to Petrograd, Savinkov paid them a visit. If until recently he had been, as one historian puts it, "a most severe case of self-hypnosis", showing a complete obliviousness of the army's actual condition in his newspaper articles,¹⁶⁰ he now painted an utterly gloomy but trustworthy picture of the situation. Poland was lost and further territorial losses in the Baltic region and in Bessarabia were unavoidable. The political

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹⁵⁶ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 329.

¹⁵⁷ Fedor Sologub, "Nad klassami", *Birzhevyie vedomosti* 8.8.1917 16376.

¹⁵⁸ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 346.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹⁶⁰ Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: Vol. 2. The Road to Soviet Power and Peace* (Princeton, 1987), p. 84.

and economic crisis was profound. Savinkov saw salvation in the introduction of a state of emergency. Together with General Lavr Kornilov from Army headquarters he intended to propose to Kerenskii the establishment of firm political power and severe measures to prevent the further disintegration of the state and the armed forces. Gippius did not hesitate in giving Savinkov her support, alarmed as she, too, was by the dissolution of Russian society. "At the moment there is no more stateless, dishonest and godless nation than us", she wrote in her diary.¹⁶¹ Her faith in Kerenskii and the Provisional Government was dwindling, while Savinkov appeared to be led by genuine love for Russia and its freedom and to possess the required strength. Gippius did not know Kornilov, but she accepted Savinkov's characterization of him as "an honest and straightforward soldier", who, guided by his patriotism, wished to save Russia.¹⁶² Their demands were that martial law should be introduced, the death penalty should be put into practice at the front, and the radical army committees should be abolished. A merciless struggle was to be waged against the Bolsheviks, the party which bore the greatest guilt for the crisis. "This is without doubt the minimum that could still save the honour of the revolution and the life of Russia in its present, unprecedented, situation", Gippius commented on Kornilov's and Savinkov's programme.¹⁶³

At this crucial moment Kerenskii frustrated all Gippius' hopes. Tied by his loyalty to the socialists in the Government and the Soviet, he shied away from a concentration of political power and a restriction of the freedom that had been achieved. Gippius explained Kerenskii's refusal to cooperate with Savinkov and Kornilov as vanity, fear of the stronger men and a loss of his once so extraordinary intuition. As a result, Savinkov handed in his resignation, which Kerenskii, full of mistrust for his former assistant, accepted. Savinkov was prepared to turn his back on politics and leave for the front as a simple officer, but on 11 August he telephoned Gippius to ask her advice, as Kerenskii had unexpectedly asked him to withdraw his resignation. Gippius found herself in a situation, in which she could exercise influence on Russian state affairs, and her advice to Savinkov was to accept Kerenskii's plea, although she was becoming convinced that the Prime Minister's days in power were numbered. Together with Merezhkovskii and the literary critic Evgenii Liatskii, Gippius wrote a joint letter to Kerenskii, in which they proposed that Savinkov should be nominated Minister of War. If Kerenskii himself was no longer able

161 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 331.

162 *Ibid.*, p. 337.

163 *Ibid.*, p. 339.

to rule, he should hand over power to someone more competent and relegate himself to the post of president. They apparently refrained from mentioning any names, but Kerenskii was bound to know the identity of their candidate.

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii was too absorbed in large-scale historical patterns and the dream of an approaching apocalypse to become deeply involved in current politics. Publicly, he had remained passive during the summer, but after the failure of the Moscow State Conference, at a moment when the existence of the Russian state seemed to be under threat, he spoke out again in an article called "Russia Exists" ("Est' Rossiia"). Merezhkovskii did not go into the dangers that Russia was facing, but focused his interest on the fact that such a critical situation had evoked so little patriotic response. On the contrary, the whole nation appeared to have been seized by an urge for self-destruction. In 1613 and 1812 the simple people had saved Russia, but now they were badly demoralized, not by the World War, however, as Blok maintained, but by centuries of autocratic rule. The Russian intelligentsia, on the other hand, was caught up in its tragic love-hate relationship with its motherland, an attitude which not even the revolution and the birth of democracy had been able to change. The first, patriotic stage of the revolution had only lasted for a few days, after which love of Russia had again been replaced by internationalism.

There was a touch of irony in the fact that Merezhkovskii, who had ardently attacked nationalism and praised universalism as a Russian vocation, was now reproaching his compatriots for their lack of patriotism. It was the course of his own development that he turned into a rule. He partly also interpreted the situation as the result of the superior qualities of the Russian character. As a denial of war and an abstract form of universalism, internationalism corresponded closely to Russia's national essence. The Russian aversion to violence, including state violence, bordered on anarchy. Rejecting war and imperialism, Russians thirsted for peace "up to the point of self-annihilation, suicide".¹⁶⁴ A policy of "peace without annexations and indemnities" was genuinely Russian, but then again completely incomprehensible and unacceptable to the Germans.

There was thus a conflict between Russia's national characteristics and the demands of the moment. Merezhkovskii found the best formulation of this tragic dilemma in the words of Gippius, "You should not make war, but you have to." The imperative to fight with pain in the heart did not only concern Russia, but also the whole of humankind. The problem was that the Russians felt only the pain and did not want to make war. Merezhkovskii's article took

¹⁶⁴ Merezhkovskii, "Est' Rossii".

the form of an appeal for the defence of Russia through a continuation of the war. While for Kerenskii the revolution was still of central concern, both Merezhkovskii and Gippius felt that the main question now was the survival of Russia. Russia did not exist for the revolution, but the revolution existed for Russia, Merezhkovskii pointed out. If Russia perished, the revolution would perish, and hence Russia had to be saved first. In the present situation patriotism was therefore a revolutionary word. What was needed was a revolutionary patriotism, "a free love for a free Russia".¹⁶⁵

Merezhkovskii had been anticipating a time when the nations would overcome their uniqueness and merge into a stateless all-humanity. As the disintegration of the Russian state was not accompanied by the emergence of a Christian sociality, he was forced to accept a compromise. Russia had to be loved and preserved as a national concept, yet not for its own sake, but for the sake of humanity. "To say that Russia exists is to say that even now, during the world slaughter, humankind still feels a great love for peace and the brotherhood of peoples", he wrote.¹⁶⁶ As the main bearers of universalism, the Russian people offered a guarantee that the revelation of the Holy Spirit would one day occur.

The opposite fear was expressed in Merezhkovskii's yet to be published novel, *December the Fourteenth* (*14 dekabria*, 1918). It had been all but finished in the spring of 1914,¹⁶⁷ but because of its sympathetic attitude toward the Decembrist uprising, it could not be published then, giving Merezhkovskii the opportunity to revise it in accordance with recent historical events. The parallels with the present situation were manifold. After having saved Europe in 1812, Russia tried to liberate itself in 1825, and thereby – according to Merezhkovskii's thinking – to liberate the whole world. If this scheme expressed the writer's hopes before February 1917, there were also hints of his post-revolutionary mood. Autocracy was the Beast the Russians had to vanquish, but if freedom was achieved without Christ, there was the danger that they themselves would turn into the Beast. Instead of Godmanhood, the world would witness the People-beast.

Upon receiving Gippius' and Merezhkovskii's letter and reading the latter's article, Kerenskii paid them a surprise visit on 22 August. Unfortunately, the Merezhkovskiis were not at home, and only their friend Dmitrii Filosofov was in. A historic opportunity was missed, but Kerenskii's brief conversation with

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 292.

Filosofov gives the impression that he had come mainly to seek understanding and not to ask for advice.¹⁶⁸ Four days later Kerenskii dismissed Kornilov from his post, either with the belief or under the pretext that the General had planned a coup. Kornilov's armed march on Petrograd collapsed within a few days. Gippius was afterwards to deny the existence of a mutiny, explaining it all as a hysterical overreaction by Kerenskii aimed at saving the Provisional Government. Kornilov had been led by his love for Russia, while Kerenskii erroneously interpreted the situation as just a struggle for power.¹⁶⁹ Gippius' belief in Kerenskii was now definitively destroyed. After the Bolshevik-dominated Red Guards had been rearmed in order to defend the Provisional Government against Kornilov, she wrote in her diary: "Kerenskii is a mad autocrat, and now a slave of the Bolsheviks."¹⁷⁰ In reality, there was no longer any government to resist the real counter-revolutionary dangers. Gippius unreservedly attributed the greatest guilt for the national catastrophe to the Prime Minister: "Kerenskii is now a faint-hearted and irresponsible person; and as his post is the highest, he is guilty of Russia's fall into the bloody abyss. He alone. May this be remembered."¹⁷¹

Another fierce critic of Kerenskii was Konstantin Bal'mont. True, he had never given Kerenskii any open support, nor does he appear ever to have been under his spell. At the crucial moment for the revolution Bal'mont joined Kerenskii's opponents with a poem, "To the Talker" ("Govoriteliu"), published in an October issue of *Utro Rossii*:

He, to whom you were beloved, despises you,
having observed your two-faced conscience.

(---)

You're not the people's will, the flower, or the kernel;
you're the barren, ascending ear.*¹⁷²

Blind to reality, Kerenskii had kept on repeating words that had lost their meaning long ago and that were never succeeded by actions. A disastrous "dualism" had thus also been characteristic of the head of state. General Lavr

168 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 353-4.

169 Zinaida Gippius, "Chernye tetradi Zinaidy Gippius", in *Zven'ia: Istoricheskii al'manakh*, vol. 11 (St. Petersburg, 1992), p. 54.

170 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 360.

171 *Ibid.*, p. 372.

* "Tot, kem byl ty liubim, preziraet tebia,/ Usmotrev dvoedushnuii sovest'./ (---)/ Ty ne volia naroda, ne tsvet, ne zerno,/ Ty vozneshchiisia kolos besplodnyi."

172 K. Bal'mont, "Govoriteliu", *Utro Rossii* 15.10.1917 248.

Kornilov, by contrast, stood out as a heroic figure. On receiving the news of his death in April 1918, Gippius wrote in her diary: "Kornilov is our only Russian hero during all these terrible years. His memory alone will remain a bright spot on the Black rotten ground, that they choose to call 'Russian history'."¹⁷³ Bal'mont celebrated Kornilov in a poem, "To General L.G. Kornilov" ("Generalu L.G. Kornilovu"), published in October. It was an inopportune decision, considering that at the time the General was imprisoned as a state criminal. In a Russia where the authorities were afraid of exercising power and where lies reigned, Kornilov appeared as an upright and brave statesman, who showed by his example that the times required patriotism and strong central power.¹⁷⁴

At the front the enemy was advancing without meeting any significant resistance. When Riga, which had already been under threat in 1915, was surrendered on 21 August, the Bolshevik party demanded that peace be concluded immediately. Gippius' sarcastic observation that even the Russians' wish to recapture Riga was seen as an expression of imperialism reveals the complex nature of the situation.¹⁷⁵ Even when the Russian army was no longer able to withstand the enemy, she herself advocated a continuation of the war.

Fedor Sologub followed developments with similar feelings of fear and desperation. In March he had expressed the hope that the national unity of the February revolution would prove to be lasting, but, as it turned out, the revolution was as unreliable a miracle as the World War. Within a few weeks Sologub once again saw himself forced publicly to brand the speculators, who, unconcerned by political changes, were enriching themselves through the war.¹⁷⁶ At street-meetings in a Petrograd that Sologub not long ago had compared to a temple, unabashed anti-war agitation could now be heard. To his ears demands for an immediate peace sounded like "to hell with everything... now we have freedom..."¹⁷⁷ The Bolsheviks were singled out as the group most to blame for Russia's disastrous situation.¹⁷⁸ Instead of using freedom for creative ends, they strove to advance the revolution;¹⁷⁹ instead of putting national interests first, they encouraged class struggle, which appealed to the lowest instincts of man;¹⁸⁰ and instead of ensuring that the soldiers would receive the necessary military training, they agitated against the war within the army itself.

173 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 362.

174 K. Bal'mont, "Generalu L.G. Kornilovu", *Utro Rossii* 15.10.1917 248.

175 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 350.

176 Fedor Sologub, "Nuvorishi", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 26.3.1917 16154.

177 Fedor Sologub, "Beseda s druž'iami", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 9.6.1917 16274.

178 Fedor Sologub, "Moi sad", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 29.9.1917 16467.

179 Fedor Sologub, "Revoliutsiia – smert'", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 1.10.1917 16471.

180 Fedor Sologub, "Novyi klass", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 23.6.1917 16298; Sologub, "Nad klassami".

The Bolsheviks' visible influence on the masses made Sologub's idealized view of his countrymen turn into contempt. A conversation with a Frenchman prompted him to ask himself why patriotism was possible in France but not in Russia. In other countries words like native country, honour and duty had a meaning, and people were prepared to fight a war to the very end.¹⁸¹ In his reply, Sologub to a large extent anticipated Merezhkovskii's explanation. The Russians displayed a fatal, unparalleled inclination for maximalism, a phenomenon that came to the fore in their attitude to socialism. However, like Christianity, socialism presupposed a developed spiritual disposition that morally wretched, modern man could not live up to. In Europe, this was generally accepted, as everyone was aware that all theories were based upon hypotheses and that a life without compromise was impossible. Men could not immediately become God's children, or instantly carry socialism into effect, but needed the support of state laws. The utopias, "the legends in the making", in the West functioned as sources of inspiration, and, unlike in Russia, nobody tried to put them into practice. The Russians had made the error of believing too strongly in German theories – Sologub again suggested a concealed German assault on the gullible Russians – and now they were paying the price.¹⁸²

Sologub did not specifically admit it, but in effect he was criticizing his own and the symbolist predisposition in general for utopian thinking, the falseness of which the war had already exposed. Forced to reconsider his former attitudes, he even presented Germany as a positive example. The German proletariat possessed the necessary virtues of patriotism and love of order, as had been shown by the German Social Democrats, who in 1914 had put the fatherland above socialism. By comparison with the Europeans, the Russians could show proof of great moral purity, but when combined with ignorance and stupidity, this virtue was dangerous. Love for humanity prevented the Russians from being patriots,¹⁸³ a view put forward also by Merezhkovskii.

In spite of their leaders' assertions, the self-confident but uneducated Russian proletariat was not ready to seize power. Sologub feared that a Bolshevik coup could only lead to hunger, riots and the violation of civil rights.¹⁸⁴ What Russia needed was a skilful leader.¹⁸⁵ The war had shown that it was not enough to have millions of people in reserve, but it was also necessary to

181 Sologub, "Beseda s druž'iami".

182 Fedor Sologub, "Burzhuaiznaia dobrodetel'", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 25.7.1917 16352.

183 *Ibid.*

184 Fedor Sologub, "Bunt", *Birzhevye vedomosti* 17.9.1917 16447.

185 Sologub, "Nad klassami".

have strong and talented individuals. This was another area in which Russia had much to learn, as individualism had consistently been opposed in Russia, whereas the West had encouraged personal development and individual creativity.¹⁸⁶ Sologub does not seem to have put much hope in Kerenskii, and as no other political leader of stature emerged, his trust was instead, rather illogically, transferred to the Russian peasant. If he could only resist the urge to rob that was now being implanted in him, he might yet save Russia.¹⁸⁷ Sologub once again spent the summer on the Volga, in a village close to Kostroma. He worked in the garden, which for him became a symbol of the beloved motherland, "mad, sick, dear Russia". What Sologub observed around him offered him some consolation, as the peasants appeared not to have been infected by the garrulousness of the townspeople, but did their work and demanded law and order. Soldiers who did not want to return to the front, met with no sympathy.¹⁸⁸

The Russian provinces were, however, changing before Sologub's eyes and soon made him recall the time before the revolution with regret. Stories were told about the cruelty of peasants who had taken the law into their own hands.¹⁸⁹ Examples of an exemplary civic attitude were growing rare, as a bourgeois spirit which put material interest first also came to the fore in the Russian provinces.¹⁹⁰ Everywhere Sologub noticed signs of decline, greed, reluctance to work, and abuse of freedom of expression.¹⁹¹ Problems of national importance met with complete indifference. At the beginning of the summer of 1917 Sologub had rejoiced at the thought of being able to escape from the Bolshevik "poison" and agitation and travel to the Volga, but by the autumn he was more than happy to return to Petrograd.

Sologub's conclusion was that the greatest threat came from within: "It is not Germany that is defeating us, but our own primitive and blind lack of restraint."¹⁹² Frightening news from the front about the murder of officers by rebellious soldiers made Sologub fear that the disintegrating front would lead to a German conquest of Russia.¹⁹³ In spite of the enemy advance, the Russians were merely talking.¹⁹⁴ After the February revolution Sologub's heart had

186 Sologub, "Pod spudom".

187 Sologub, "Razval", *Birzhevyye vedomosti* 10.9.1917 16435.

188 Sologub, "Moi sad"; Fedor Sologub, "Derevenskoe", *Birzhevyye vedomosti* 18.3.1917 16142.

189 Fedor Sologub, "Dukhovnaia i nedruzhnaia", *Birzhevyye vedomosti* 8.10.1917 16483.

190 Fedor Sologub, "Dremota", *Birzhevyye vedomosti* 22.10.1917 16507.

191 Sologub, "Razval".

192 *Ibid.*

193 Sologub, "Burzhuaznaia dobrodetel".

194 Sologub, "Drevniaia istoriia: Razgovor".

been warmed by the signs of a new, pure belief in “the word”,¹⁹⁵ but now, six months later, free speech had turned into an endless torrent of words that led nowhere. “Where are the words that create miracles?”, Sologub asked rhetorically in September 1917.¹⁹⁶ Nothing was left of the belief in the poet’s task of imposing his will upon events through his craft. He had tried repeatedly to foresee the future, but in Russia’s hour of destiny all his predictions had proved to be erroneous. Instead he recalled an old poem of his, “The Devil’s Swing” (“Chertovo kachelo”) of 1907. The thought that Russia might end up in “the devil’s swing”, unable to control its future, appeared to be a frightening but quite realistic prophesy.¹⁹⁷ In his last article before the October revolution, Sologub painted a gloomy picture of a Russia, which had fallen into a slumber that looked like lethargy, or even the last sleep.¹⁹⁸

In her diary Zinaida Gippius talked scornfully about the Russian intelligentsia which had failed to take any responsibility for its native country. In reality there was active and loud support for the defence of Russia and harsh criticism of the Bolsheviks and the passive government. Gippius realized the need for propaganda, but as yet she, too, preferred to remain passive, leaving it to others, such as Sologub, Bal’mont and Leonid Andreev, to speak out for the continuation of the war and the preservation of the Russian state. When Savinkov invited Gippius to join a planned newspaper after the defeat of the “Kornilov mutiny”, she displayed the same kind of reasoning as the despised Kerenskii, refusing her cooperation for fear of being linked with the Right in the eyes of the moderate Socialist Revolutionaries.¹⁹⁹ Gippius dreamed of a collective open letter of protest against the weakness of the Provisional Government,²⁰⁰ but she refrained from taking any steps towards the realization of her plan.

Russia could no longer be saved. A recurrent thought Gippius had during the period 1914–1918 was that Russia’s development was irretrievably out of step. For a long time during the war it had been too early for reforms, but suddenly it was already too late. In the summer of 1917, Gippius came to the conclusion that the February revolution had occurred too late,²⁰¹ and by the autumn, it was too late to save it. All measures against a Bolshevik seizure of

195 Sologub, “Liturgiiia”.

196 Sologub, “Drevniaia istoriia: Razgovor”.

197 Sologub, “Dukhovnaia i nedruznaia”.

198 Sologub, “Dremota”.

199 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. 1, p. 368.

200 *Ibid.*, p. 371.

201 *Ibid.*, p. 351.

power were useless. "The ball is over", Gippius wrote resignedly in September.²⁰²

Gippius chose not to publish her few poems written in the autumn of 1917. Poetry functioned solely as a private outlet for personal bitterness and disgust for a humankind which appeared to have been forsaken by God ("Gibel", "Tli"). The only symbolist still to cling actively to poetry was Konstantin Bal'mont. From September right up to the October revolution, he continued publishing untiringly in such newspapers as *Utro Rossii*, *Russkoe slovo* and *Russkaia volia*.²⁰³ His earlier concern not to let the worries of the moment enter poetry had by now vanished. The dominant feeling was one of disillusionment, despair and wrath. The collective pronoun "we" was again exchanged for the "I" of an outsider, commenting on events in a highly subjective, emotional tone. All the achievements of the revolution seemed to have been lost. National unity was gone; honour, conscience and humaneness had been forgotten, and greed, stupidity, egoism, indolence, impudence and mob law reigned. The army was corrupt and demoralized, and industry and agriculture were in decline. Not only freedom, but the very existence of Russia was under threat, and Bal'mont did not see light anywhere:

The days go by. The troubles only grow.
The day of reckoning advances quickly,
And each minute leads the country
from one disgrace to another.*²⁰⁴

Bal'mont's central symbol for the February revolution had been the spring sun. Now this life-giving force had been exhausted, and autumn was a more appropriate illustration of Russia's predicament. Autumn reduced the roads to mud, illustrating how the distance between human hearts grew larger and bonds of friendship were cut. Traditionally the autumn was the season of harvest, but this time there was no joyful expectation in the air, as only "lies" had been sown ("Osen").²⁰⁵ For Bal'mont the dark force of history was no longer Germany, but Russia. In the spring its visage had been bright ("Posledniaia tkan"),²⁰⁶ but

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 359.

* "Dni idut. Vse shire smuty./ Chas rasplaty zreet skoro./ I vedut stranu minuty/ Ot pozora do pozora."

²⁰³ Orlov (*Pereput'ia*, p. 208) also mentions *Respublika*, a "nonpartisan democratic newspaper" that started to appear in Tiflis at the end of June 1917.

²⁰⁴ K. Bal'mont, "Chas rasplaty", *Utro Rossii* 12.9.1917 220.

²⁰⁵ K.D. Bal'mont, *Marevo* (Paris, 1922), p. 17 ("Osen"). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 1.10.1917 224.

²⁰⁶ Bal'mont, *Marevo*, p. 16 ("Posledniaia tkan").

now it had turned its back on truth and God. The “holy freedom” had been but a brief dream (“Rossiiskaia derzhava”).²⁰⁷ Bal’mont experienced the metamorphosis of Russia as a personal tragedy. “This summer I am alone in an empty dacha,/ this summer I lost my love for Russia” (“Etim letom – ia odin v pustynnoi dache,/ Etim letom – ia Rossiia razliubil”), he confessed in “This Summer” (“Etim letom”).²⁰⁸ The war had been a challenge to Bal’mont’s outlook on life and to the basis of his writing, but the present situation hurt him even more keenly:

How can I be a stranger of another creed among my own?
 Deep night, conceal me, save me from the day;
 I cannot breathe, nor live with a pierced heart;
 I no longer have brothers in the world.*²⁰⁹

The belief in the Russian people that the February revolution had rekindled in Bal’mont was gone.²¹⁰ Senseless inner feuding had blinded the Russians (“Skit”),²¹¹ and instead of God, a “Dark One” was standing by their side (“A teper”).²¹² It was a demonic power that had brought forth the low, bestial side of man (“K rodnomu narodu”). Just as in 1905-1906, the human face of the revolution had gradually turned into “the face of the Beast.”²¹³ In the poem “The Pendulum” (“Maiatnik”), the pendulum seems over and over again to remind the sleepless poet of his errors: “You were mistaken in everything. Your own people/ are not what you dreamt, not what you dreamt.” (“Ty oshibsia vo vsem. Tvoi rodinyi narod,/ On ne tot, chto mechtal ty, – ne tot.”)²¹⁴ The most distressing thought was of the soldiers who had betrayed Russia. Like Sologub, Bal’mont concluded that the dissolution of the army and the growing influ-

²⁰⁷ Bal’mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 45 (“Rossiiskaia derzhava”).

²⁰⁸ K. Bal’mont, “Etim letom”, *Utro Rossii* 2.9.1917 213.

* “Sredi svoikh kak byt’ mne inovertsem?/ Gustaia noch’, ukroi, spasi ot dnia,/ Nel’zia dyshat’, ni zhit’ s probitym serdtsem,/ Net bol’she v mire brat’ev u menia.”

²⁰⁹ K. Bal’mont, *Marevo*, p. 15 (“Ia znal”). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 1.10.1917 224.

²¹⁰ See, for example, “Rossiiskaia derzhava” in Bal’mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 45.

²¹¹ K. Bal’mont, “Skit”, *Russkaia volia* 15.10.1917 245.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 38 (“A teper”). First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 24.9.1917 230.

²¹³ Bal’mont, *Izbrannoe* (1990), p. 588 (Bal’mont’s comm. to “Ia s uzhasom teper’ chitait skazki...”).

²¹⁴ Bal’mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 39 (“Maiatnik”).

ence of the Bolsheviks bore witness to a national lack of endurance, willpower and character.²¹⁵

In his article "Three Measures" ("Tri mery"), Bal'mont summarized Russia's catastrophic path: first the loss of national unity, then the weakness of the authorities and, finally, the dissolution of the army.²¹⁶ It was a united nation that had cast off its yoke in the February revolution, but soon Russia had splintered into classes and parties, which were quarrelling with one another, while the real, external enemy advanced. A fateful role in the process of Russia's disintegration was played by the Marxist concept of class struggle. For Bal'mont, as well as for Sologub and Merezhkovskii, class struggle was equal to class egoism. A nation consisted of all classes together, and the will of the people could not be expressed by one group alone. Bal'mont also defined his own position, so as to secure for himself the right to speak in the name of Russia. The "free poet" was also part of the will of the people, and it was the degree of talent and not social background that was of importance. Pushkin had been a better spokesman for Russia than the poet Aleksei Kol'tsov, even if the latter was of peasant origin, while Pushkin was a nobleman.²¹⁷ In a remarkable way, Bal'mont foresaw what would be the dominant marxist approach to literature during the first decades of the Soviet period.

Another devastating theory, connected with the concept of class struggle, was the demand for perpetual revolution. The revolution was a thunderstorm, but eternal thunderstorms were against the law of nature: "The revolution is good, when it throws out oppression. But the world does not live through revolutions but through evolution."²¹⁸ What Russia needed was firm authority, a government of strong individuals, which would act firmly against those, who, devoid of any feeling for Russia, had set themselves up in opposition to the power of the people.²¹⁹ But the leadership of Russia had also been di-

215 Orlov's (*Pereput'ia*, p. 208) remark that the Russian people and the army wanted peace, while the bourgeois political parties and Bal'mont were for a continuation of the war, explains little of the complicated situation in 1917. The same must be said of Tsekhnovits'er's (p. 356) comment that Bal'mont was against "the revolutionary elements" in the army, since the poet asked them to defend "bourgeois freedom", as well as of Makogonenko's (p. 19) curious opinion that support of the war meant joining the cadets.

216 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, pp. 36-8 ("Tri mery"). First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 8.9.1917 218.

217 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, pp. 32-3 ("Narodnaia volia"). First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 3.9.1917 224.

218 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

219 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

vided. Without taking the part either of the Provisional Government or the Soviet, Bal'mont expressed his indignation at "the lifeless tossing/ of the double-headed monster" ("bezzhiznennye metan'ia/ Dvuglavogo uroda")²²⁰ and "the two-faced lie" ("dvulikaia lozh")²²¹. No real political power could exist in Russia, because "where there is dual power, neither side has any power".²²² The Provisional Government bore the responsibility for this situation, as it did not perceive and conduct itself as an authority, but allowed the evil to spread.

It may seem odd that the anarchist Bal'mont was calling for firm leadership, but for him unity, strong authority and a disciplined army were needed to ensure Russia's possibility of continuing the war to a victorious conclusion. Only in this way could freedom be preserved in Russia. When the critic Vladimir Orlov claims that Bal'mont was frightened by the turn events were taking and turned radically to the right in July 1917,²²³ he refuses to acknowledge that the poet actually showed a remarkably unwavering firmness of principles. The war still lay at the core of Bal'mont's concerns. Stopping the enemy's offensive was the most urgent task, but of equal importance were Russia's obligations towards the Allied Powers.²²⁴ The war also functioned as a test for the Russians. The individualism that Bal'mont stood for was not passive and isolated, but active and creative, based on inner discipline and a feeling of responsibility and honour. The war was cruel, but it was, to use Sologub's formulation, "a task in creation", a plight that had to be overcome.

Bal'mont wanted to see himself as a voice above parties, but again, as in 1905, he was dragged into the political struggle. The intensely personal poetic document "To Him Who Blames Me" ("Uprekaiushchemu menia"), dated 12 October and published three days later, was an attempt to answer potential criticism.²²⁵ It had, for example, been argued that Bal'mont was essentially a "smooth-tongued singer", unfit for writing heated political poems. The conflict had already been pointed out in connection with the 1905 revolution. In an early poem from *Let Us Become Like the Sun* (*Budem kak solntse*, 1903), he had indeed even maintained that the feeling of hatred as such was alien to him. Bal'mont now commented that it was impossible to write on lofty, abstract

220 Bal'mont, "Chas rasplaty".

221 Bal'mont, *Marevo*, p. 8 ("K obezumevshei"). First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 14.9.1917 222.

222 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 33 ("Narodnaia volia").

223 Orlov, *Pereput'ia*, p. 208.

224 Bal'mont, *Marevo*, p. 8 ("K obezumevshei"); Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, pp. 41-2 ("Solnechnaia ugroza"). First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 23.9.1917 229.

225 Bal'mont, *Marevo*, pp. 24-5 ("Uprekaiushchemu menia"). First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 15.10.1917 248.

themes and to concentrate on his own inner feelings at a moment when millions of people were suffering. His inner world had totally disintegrated. To those who questioned his right to condemn the deserting soldiers, given that he had not participated in the war himself, Bal'mont replied by listing dangerous situations that he had faced in his own life. Not only had the soldier's obligation to defend his native land been rejected, but so also had the duty "to carry the cross" in the hour of trial.

Bal'mont had already talked about the future in strongly pessimistic terms in September. "Is there any sense left in Russia?/ Is there even a small light in the night?" ("Razve est' eshche v Rossii razum?/ Razve est' v nochi khot' maliy svet?"), he asked in the poem "Evil Shrove-tide" ("Zlaia maslianitsa").²²⁶ Irrespective of whether his poems were presented in the form of dreams, like "The Flower in the Dream" ("Sniashchiisia tsvetok"),²²⁷ or whether they were straightforward analyses of the political situation, they were filled with a conviction that everything that was happening would have far-reaching and negative consequences for Russia, both on the public and the private moral planes. In a situation where "Many-voiced is the liar, the honourable one is mute" ("Mnogoglasen lzhivyi, chestnyi nem"),²²⁸ Bal'mont no longer had any illusions about his own possibility of influencing developments. The belief in the power of the poetic word was lost, even if Bal'mont also expressed this disillusionment in poetic form.²²⁹

Bal'mont did not define his apprehensions concretely. What was apparently his last poem to be published before the October revolution, "The Last Call" ("Poslednii klich"), was not a warning against the Bolsheviks, who at that moment were already making preparations for a coup, but a final appeal to the Russian soldiers to continue the war. One last time Bal'mont called for strong authority, praised the few loyal soldiers and reminded his readers that Russia could not be rescued by words – a final allusion to Kerenskii and the Provisional Government – but only by deeds.²³⁰

Viacheslav Ivanov had returned to Moscow from the Caucasus in the early autumn.²³¹ He kept aloof from politics, but the homage he paid to Bal'mont in a few poems reveals his attitude. In 1915 he had hailed Bal'mont's free, rest-

²²⁶ Bal'mont, *Marevo*, p. 14 ("Zlaia maslianitsa"). First publ. in *Utro Rossii* 6.10.1917 240.

²²⁷ Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, pp. 43-4 ("Sniashchiisia tsvetok").

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9 ("K obezumevshei").

²³⁰ K. Bal'mont, "Poslednii klich", *Utro Rossii* 23.10.1917 254.

²³¹ Ivanova, p. 67.

lessly searching spirit and the ardour of his commitment.²³² Now – in late 1917 – he singled out Bal'mont's patriotism and love of freedom. At one with his native land, Bal'mont trembled like a "sensitive string", branding the enemies of freedom.²³³ Concepts like freedom, honour, duty and work were as dear to Ivanov as they were to Bal'mont.²³⁴ In a situation where these values were under threat, Ivanov gave his support to Bal'mont and his demands for a continuation of the war and a struggle against the extreme Left.²³⁵

Bal'mont's lamentation for "the felled Russian tree"²³⁶ also made a deep impression on Ivanov. Despite the gloomy circumstances, he himself was unwilling to forget the idea of a Slavonic community. On the eve of the October revolution, he delivered a speech at the Moscow Conference of Slavonic Organizations on the spiritual dimension of the Slavs. He uncompromisingly propounded the notion of the Slavonic world's inner unity, a common spiritual calling based on *sobornost'*. It was in the future manifestation of an all-human consciousness that the true, individual "I" of the Slavonic peoples would find its genuine form. When claiming that the Slavs bore within themselves the spirit of the law, which was lacking in the written word, he was repeating a central thought of the Slavophiles. Discontented with individual and national limitations, the Slavs yearned for the all-human. While Merezhkovskii and Sologub by now saw this predilection as responsible for the catastrophes of 1917, Ivanov felt no hesitation. The Slavs were despised for their lack of restraint and moderation, but, belittling the imminent danger of "dark chaos and ungovernable passions", he still found it more urgent to warn of "dead, soulless order", or the German ideal of organization. The Slavonic inability to create a compulsory sociality should be seen as something positive, as it indicated a thirst for a "choric concord" and *sobornost'*.²³⁷

Ivanov's speech could not have been less timely. Russia's bonds with the rest of the Slavonic world were non-existent, as it was struggling for its own physical survival. At a time when Russia's internal political feuding was reaching its apogee, Ivanov foresaw the day when the Slavs would tell the world their "universal Word". At a meeting arranged by the Moscow Aleksandr S Scriabin

232 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 31 ("Bal'montu" / "Liubliu tebia – za to, chto ty gorish'..." /).

233 *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 66 ("Bal'montu" / "Za to chto v trepete godin..." /).

234 See, for example, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 61 ("Vpered, narod svobodnyi").

235 Bal'mont's answered Ivanov's "Bal'montu" ("Liubliu tebia – za to, chto ty gorish'..." with the poem "Viaz'" (K.D. Bal'mont, *Sonety solntsa, meda, i luny: Pesnia mirov* [Moscow, 1917], p. 230).

236 Bal'mont, *Marevo*, p. 7 ("Proshchanie s drevom"). First publ. in *Russkoe slovo* 1.10.1917 224.

237 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, pp. 670–1 ("Dukhovnyi lik slavianstva").

Society in October, he furthermore demonstrated that he still trusted the war to function as the impetus for a future, organic epoch. In the wake of external metamorphoses a spiritual transfiguration would occur. Ivanov found it safest, though, to add that this scheme would be fulfilled only if “the spirit of God” were present in such developments and if the fall of Russian autocracy had indeed been part of the longed-for revolution of the spirit.²³⁸ His wording revealed a growing suspicion that the opposite was the case.

The revolution would establish the true power of the people, and it would thereby relieve the intelligentsia of its burden of guilt. That was – put simply – Aleksandr Blok’s view in March 1917. The trend of events proved to be much more complex. Soon Blok was seized with the feeling that, just like the World War, the February revolution had not brought about any fundamental changes. No personal relief could be felt. On 18 April Blok was travelling by train from Petrograd to Moscow in a first-class international carriage, chatting in French with his fellow-traveller, an engineer from Paris. Watching the crowds from his window and remembering that according to the Gregorian Calendar it was International Labor Day, the first to be celebrated in a free Russia, he was overwhelmed by one of his recurrent attacks of shame. Russia was on the brink of collapse and famine, while he was safely enclosed in his world of privileges. “If I were them, I would drive everybody out and hang them”, he commented.²³⁹

What followed in 1917 and 1918 can be seen partly as a voluntary, self-inflicted punishment. The recurrent theme of revenge in Blok’s poetry appeared to have come to life on the streets. Rejecting his social origins and natural sympathies, Blok made yet another attempt to attune himself to the spirit of the masses. It was not a rational decision based on available information. As always, Blok was mainly “listening to his nerves”, carefully registering his feelings of anxiety. Furthermore, Blok’s conception of the people was totally vague. His notebook and diary give the impression that for him the Russian people consisted of Stepan, the door-keeper of his house. Blok was clearly shaping an image of the people that was in accord with his own dissatisfaction with reality.

At the time of the February revolution, Blok had dismissed the common phrase “the revolutionary people” as a myth. After centuries of autocracy the Russian people could not change overnight, and the revolution had therefore been more of a miracle than the result of a conscious effort of will.²⁴⁰ Only

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 193-4 (“Skriabin i dukh revoliutsii”).

²³⁹ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 317.

²⁴⁰ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 255.

six weeks later one finds Blok writing "People" with a capital letter and rebuking the Russian intelligentsia for its attempt to *lower* itself to the level of the people. He found the real hierarchy to be the opposite: you had to *raise* yourself to the level of the people.²⁴¹ In the autumn of 1914 Blok had stood aloof when Sologub, Andreev, Aleksei Tolstoi and others had praised the wisdom of the Russian people, but now, as the others were losing their belief, he started to express himself in the same vein: "What *right* do we (the brains of the country) have to offend with our rotten bourgeois scepticism the wise, calm and very knowledgeable revolutionary people?"²⁴² Merezhkovskii's reply to the same question had been affirmative: as a revolutionary force since 1825 and one of the factors behind the February revolution, the intelligentsia had indeed earned the right to participate in the formation of a new Russia. Blok's attitude was different. The educated classes were doomed to be shut out of the utopia because of their background and mentality, and, being one of them, he had no right to try to impose his will upon the course of events.

A sign of Blok's change of attitude was his negative response to all invitations to take part in undertakings of a political and cultural nature. He had no wish to support the Constitutional Democrats in their campaign for the coming elections to a Constituent Assembly, nor did he wish to join the "League of Russian Culture", even though he respected Petr Struve, the initiator of the league, and the educational program that the organization set about implementing.²⁴³ These were voices that belonged to the past and, consequently, temptations to be overcome. Blok, nevertheless, found it difficult to be entirely consistent. He was a Constitutional Democrat and a nationalist, if not in spirit then by background, and his artistic gift, which comprised the ability to perceive everybody's truth, hung over him, as he saw it now, not like a true gift, but like a curse, paralyzing his will-power.²⁴⁴ In the elections to the Petrograd Duma in May, Blok gave his vote to the list of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks,²⁴⁵ but deep down he felt drawn to "bolshevism".²⁴⁶ The word "bolshevism" was written in quotation marks, in order to stress that it was not so much the party programme, but the radical spirit of Lenin and his followers that appealed to him. "Bolshevism" was synonymous with the unbridled elements and an unruly, riotous attitude to life, and was therefore a

241 *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 277.

242 *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 266. See also vol. VIII, p. 504 (letter, 21 June 1917).

243 *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, pp. 509-10.

244 *Ibid.*, vol. VII, pp. 280, 284.

245 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 351; Blok, *Pis'ma Aleksandra Bloka k rodnym*, vol. II, p. 370.

246 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 258.

genuine expression of the Scythian Russian soul.²⁴⁷ There was also a destructive element in bolshevism that Blok felt affinities with.²⁴⁸ Gone was the fear of demoralization, and the one thing Blok dreaded above all was that the revolution would come to a halt, take a moderate turn and, as he saw it, lose its way. The main enemy was the petty-bourgeois spirit, which Blok identified not merely as “vulgarity” (*poshlost*), but even as a “Satanic” force.²⁴⁹ It manifested itself in the dream of well-being and prosperity, in clinging to the principle of private property (even the gathering of “spiritual property” was suspect), and in demands for a strong state.²⁵⁰ Blok’s description of his private enemy was in fact very much in the spirit of the widespread Russian – and symbolist – image of Germany at the outset of the war.

When, in the summer of 1917, the Provisional Government made half-hearted attempts to restore order through the reintroduction of the death penalty at the front, improvements in the army’s fighting efficiency and restrictions on the Bolsheviks’ freedom of assembly and speech, all measures that the majority of symbolists had long been calling for, Blok was terrified and complained that something “terrible” was going on.²⁵¹ The “Kornilov affair” he interpreted as an attempt to restrain the revolutionary process and therefore as odious.²⁵² The dissolution of the Russian state and its armed forces could frighten him at times, but he managed to convince himself that all this was in the spirit of the Russian people’s revolutionary sentiment.

Blok’s involvement in the Scythian movement together with Belyi was an expression of his acceptance of developments. Blok was prepared to agree with Ivanov-Razumnik, the main spokesman for Scythianism, that the revolution had above all to be a radical spiritual transformation of mankind and that the Asian traits of the Russian character – unruly and chaotic, but also dynamic and heroic in its spontaneity – secured a significant role in this process for the Russians. What was required from the individual was a spiritual maximalism that regarded stagnation with distaste and faced social catastrophes and upheavals fearlessly. A similar position had been adopted by Sologub in 1915, but then it was associated with a pro-war attitude. At a time when the other symbolists were gradually losing their faith in Russia, anticipating only darkness ahead, Blok and Belyi were filled with an optimistic feeling that “something

²⁴⁷ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 359; Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 292.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. VII, pp. 291-2.

²⁴⁹ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 328.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. VII, pp. 279, 291.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 294.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 306.

completely new”, an epoch better than the present one, was drawing closer.²⁵³ Russia’s trials did not shatter Blok’s belief that his native country had a special mission, as yet unfulfilled. “Everything will be well, Russia will be great”, he reassured himself,²⁵⁴ and the fact that Russia was shrinking geographically every day, had nothing to do with the real, spiritual revolution that was about to dawn.

The October Revolution: The End or the Beginning?

The October revolution did not come as a surprise. People had been waiting passively for an uprising for several weeks. The problem was, as Zinaida Gippius put it, that even if many were prepared to fight the Bolsheviks, few were prepared to defend the Kerenskii regime any longer. Once more Gippius’ diary offers a striking picture of the actual coup. She could follow some of the events from her balcony, and the noise of the storming of the Winter Palace on the night of 25 October resounded all the way to her and Merezhkovskii’s flat near the Tauride Park.

Gippius had refrained from commenting publicly on the February revolution and the disastrous path of the Provisional Government and Russian democracy. The Bolsheviks’ victory made her break her silence. For as long as it was possible she published political poems in *Vechernii zvon*, a short-lived sequel to the banned Cadet newspaper *Rech’*, and *Novye vedomosti*, afterwards including them in the volume, *Last Poems (Poslednie stikhi)*, 1918). In 1914 she had felt annoyed at the invective that other Russian writers heaped upon the German enemy, but now she herself adopted a strong and crude language in order to insult the new authorities. Two lines in the poem “To Them” (“Im”), published on the anniversary of the Decembrist uprising – “Oh, the noose of Nicholas was cleaner/ than the fingers of these gray apes!” (“O, petlia Nikolaia – chishche,/ Chem pal’tsy serykh obez’ian!”) – were even considered too defiant by the publisher of the newspaper.²⁵⁵

As Gippius saw it, the October revolution was not a reaction against the World War, but the final triumph of the war: “The war finished off our human soul, ate it up and spat it out.”²⁵⁶ On the Great Path, the October revolution was

253 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 318; Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VIII, p. 487.

254 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 318.

255 Gippius, “Chernye teatradi Zinaidy Gippius”, p. 35.

256 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 390.

an even bigger step back than the war, as it appeared to eliminate all possibility of ever establishing universalism and the Kingdom of God on earth. The victory of the Bolsheviks and their collective thinking signified a rejection of the freedom, consciousness and will of the individual, and as an attempt to establish a social order without Christianity, it meant a victory for the Kingdom of the Antichrist.

In 1915 Dmitrii Merezhkovskii had still been able to believe in a happy and strong future for Russia,²⁵⁷ but what he now saw was national disintegration and a loss of the freedom that had been gained in the February revolution. The Bolshevik takeover was moreover a rejection of the Provisional Government, which was, in spite of all its shortcomings, the brains of the Russian revolution and the voice of the Russian intelligentsia. It seemed as if Merezhkovskii's hidden fears about the unrestricted radicalism of the Russian people were coming true.²⁵⁸

Together with Gippius and Merezhkovskii, Fedor Sologub appeared on 21 January 1918 at a soirée, arranged by the political Red Cross.²⁵⁹ For him the October revolution was a national disgrace, as it aimed to get Russia out of the World War.²⁶⁰ Konstantin Bal'mont agreed: the coup was a victory for the deserters, the Devil's children ("Krov' i ogon'"), who because of their treachery were doomed to eternal contempt. Revenge and national catastrophe were sure to follow in their footsteps.²⁶¹ By now it seemed futile to fight the Bolsheviks with the pen, and Bal'mont tried instead to cleanse his own reputation. In early 1918 he published a booklet with the title *Am I a Revolutionary or Not (Revoliutsioner ia ili net)*. There were of course more urgent questions to be asked in Russia at that point in time, but the same question was in fact also put forward by the Cheka, the Soviet security organ. Evading political labels, Bal'mont had on that occasion defined his position with a simple "I am a poet."²⁶² The main point about Bal'mont's brochure is not that it illustrates "how little he understood the Revolution and how incapable he was of serving it after the Bolsheviks took power",²⁶³ but, more precisely, how far he was from the October revolution and how incapable he was of serving the Bolsheviks.

257 D. Merezhkovskii, "Uspokoilis", *Russkoe slovo* 10.11.1915 258.

258 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II p. 260.

259 Gippius, "Chernye tetrady Zinaidy Gippius", pp. 61, 151-2.

260 Gleb Struve, "Tri sud'by: Blok, Gumilev, Sologub", *Novyi zhurnal* XVII (1947), p. 206.

261 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 48 ("Krov' i ogon").

262 Quoted in Makogomenko, p. 19.

263 Rodney L. Patterson, "Bal'mont, Konstantin Dmitrievich", in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet Literature*, vol. 2 (Gulf Breeze, Florida, 1978), p. 80.

What Bal'mont wished to prove was that it was possible to be a revolutionary – both politically and mentally – even if you rejected socialism and the October revolution. His political poems of 1905 and 1917 did indeed testify to his staunch stand against the tsarist regime, and the biographical evidence for an early involvement in the revolutionary movement was also correct. Now the red colour of the banners was disgraced (“K obezumevshei”),²⁶⁴ and just a few months of Bolshevik rule had confirmed that socialism meant “spiritual penal servitude” and the absence of individual freedom. The anarchism of Petr Kropotkin was closer to Bal'mont, but, above all, he saw himself as a poet with self-realization as his ideal. Freedom was the point where personal and national interests met.

Am I a Revolutionary or Not was further testimony to Bal'mont's courage and genuine lack of opportunism. Even if he occasionally showed signs of war-weariness, he never turned against the war. It remained for him the main issue even after the February revolution, and he condemned everything which weakened the army's fighting capability. His anti-Bolshevism also emerged from his involvement in the war. Both the Germans and the Bolsheviks presented threats to freedom, individuality and, consequently, to Beauty, the highest goal of humanity's striving.

The October revolution had a direct effect on people's private worlds. The comfortable, sheltered life that Russian writers had loved to scorn as petty-bourgeois soon became an impossibility. Before the war, elevated, eternal ideas were discussed in Viacheslav Ivanov's “Tower”, the famous Wednesday salon, high up in his St. Petersburg flat. After October 1917, the turmoil of the revolution forced him down into the basement of the building in Moscow, where he had moved before the war. His duty was no longer that of a seer for the masses, but of a guard protecting the house against marauding soldiers and thieves. As the effects of the war now reached Ivanov's immediate vicinity, realism made its mark on his poetry. The “myth-creator in the Tower” abandoned his abstract and magnificent style in order to present plain depictions of an intolerable situation:

With a candle in the cellar
I sit guarding
the hushed house.
Anxiety, lassitude...

²⁶⁴ Bal'mont, *Marevo*, p. 9 (“K obezumevshei”).

Sometimes closer, sometimes farther away
the exchange of fire – it just goes on...²⁶⁵

During the street fighting, the Uspenskii Cathedral in the Kremlin was badly damaged by a shell. Ivanov reacted with an indignant poem.²⁶⁶ This poem alone, with its wrathful accusation of apostasy, shows the falseness of the Soviet claim that Ivanov neither accepted nor rejected the October revolution. His poems were published in *Narodopravstvo*, a journal edited by his friend Georgii Chulkov, and *Luch pravdy*, the organ of the Union of Soldiers' and Peasants' Education. The publication of the book *Native and Universal* (*Rodnoe i vselenskoe*) late in 1917 was also a comment on Russia's crisis. It might look astonishing that Ivanov chose to collect his main wartime articles, considering that so few of his prophecies had materialized. A freshly written article, "Machiavellism and Masochism" ("Makiavellizm i mazokhizm"), reveals that he, however, still hoped to create a functional synthesis out of his basic ideas. The theory of "the Yellow Peril" was abandoned, and instead Ivanov tried to prove there was a connection between Germany and the Bolsheviks. Already Dostoevskii had claimed the existence of a vital bond between Germany and Russia. The claim was that Germany could not exist without Russia's support. Its main goal in the war had therefore been to establish an external alliance with Russia by forcing it into a position of dependence. Germany found an unexpected ally in this endeavour in the Bolsheviks. By agitating against the war and the Allied Powers and working for a "shameful peace", the Bolsheviks had come to serve the cause of the enemy, without clearly realizing what the actual results would be.²⁶⁷

Close contacts with Germany were in themselves also advantageous for the Bolsheviks, Ivanov argued. Agrarian Russia lacked the developed industry that Marx had seen as a necessity for the birth of a proletariat and the creation of a revolutionary situation, and therefore the Bolsheviks had to conclude that a socialist revolution was impossible in Russia without German assistance. Through a union with Germany, the homeless Russian revolutionary spirit could be infused into the German working class, leading to a revolution which would then spread all over the world. Eventually it would also reach

* "So svezhekoi v podvale/ Sizhu ia na strazhe/ Pritikhshogo doma./ Trevoga, istoma.../ To blizhe, to dale/ Perestrelka, – vse ta zhe..."

265 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 72 ("Pesni smutnogo vremeni").

266 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 65 ("Kogda koshchunstvennyi snariad upal nad starshim..."). First publ. in *Russkie – russkomu ofitseru* (Moscow, 1918).

267 Viacheslav Ivanov, *Rodnoe i vselenskoe* (Moscow, 1994), p. 321 (Makiavelizm).

Russia, by then industrialized with the help of German capital. The Bolsheviks would be helped in their plans by the latent pro-German feelings that existed in Russia, the phenomenon that Sologub, among others, had devoted so much attention to. The naively trustful Russian people offered no resistance, while the intelligentsia had long been a pupil of Germany in every respect. Germany served all Russia's needs in the fields of technology, science, philosophy and culture. This was what Ivanov called Russian "culture-masochism". Picking up Nikolai Berdiaev's argument from their polemic in 1915, Ivanov described feminine Slavdom as being in love with sternly masculine Germany. The role of the October revolution was to prepare for their wedding.²⁶⁸ Translating this into Ivanov's terminology, it meant that Slavonic *sobornost'* was about to succumb to the German organizational ideal, that is to the temptation of the Antichrist, which Ivanov had fought all through the World War. He had every reason to oppose the Bolsheviks, just as he had earlier been an enemy of Germany.

Ivanov's main comment on the October revolution is a cycle of poems, "Songs of the Time of Troubles" ("Pesni smutnogo vremeni"), published shortly before the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty. Just as he had done at the outbreak of the World War in 1914, Ivanov chose the form of a diary in verse, with the time span stretching from November 1917 to the end of January 1918. The cycle contains realistic scenes of Moscow in the throes of revolution, but no attention is paid to the main events of the period: the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly and the Russo-German peace negotiations. Seen from Ivanov's perspective, these were of less importance than the hidden movements of the spiritual world. Ivanov was now prepared to admit that Russia was in a state of collapse and that his image of the Russian nation needed modification. Russia is pictured as having two faces, not only the face of Christopher the God-bearer,²⁶⁹ but also that of Cain, the brother-killer. A cosmic struggle is taking place within the nation. For the moment, Russia's divine face is hidden and people are forced to live in the darkness of evil. The eternal, ontological Russia has been locked up by its own sons and is waiting meekly for sentence to be passed on it.

Ivanov felt the presence of a punitive, demonic force behind the events of October. If Bolshevik rule was to be overthrown and the spiritual great-

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

²⁶⁹ Ivanov alluded to the legend about Saint Christopher, who, while carrying the child Jesus across a river, was pressed under water by his burden and did not drown but was instead baptised. Already in his article "O russkoi idee" (1909), "the Christ-bearer" was used as an image of Russia's predicament, stooping under its holy mission, dreaming of salvation on the brink of destruction. (*Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 336.)

ness of Russia restored, it had to happen through divine intervention, and not through human actions. The poem “I know, Lord, there will be a miracle over Russia...” (“Znaiu, Gospodi, – budet nad Rus’iu chudo...”) of November 1917 contains a majestic vision of how “Russia rises up amazingly in new glory/ and in new power as the bride of Christ” (“... vosstanet divno Rus’ vo slave novoi/ I v derzhave novoi, nevestoi Khristovoi”).²⁷⁰ After the Antichrist had been driven out, Russia would emerge as a glorious example of Heaven’s might. The Slavophile notion of Russia as a Chosen Nation merged with the symbolist’s expectation of an approaching transfiguration of man. The condition for this was the defeat of the Bolsheviks.

A final joint action by the Russian intelligentsia concerned freedom of expression. All major newspapers, for many years the outlets and employers of Russian writers, were prohibited soon after the October revolution. A group of Petrograd writers – among them Merezhkovskii, Gippius and Sologub – protested about this on 26 November by issuing a single-issue publication, *Gazeta-Protest*. In 1915, Gippius had complained in her diary that wartime censorship was five times fiercer than it had been in the pre-war period, but she now admitted that tsarist censorship had been innocuous, when compared to the draconian measures taken by the Bolsheviks.²⁷¹ Even so, just like Sologub,²⁷² she expressed her conviction that the free word could not be defeated. Merezhkovskii, who had always fought against what he called “the death penalty of the word,”²⁷³ commented on the issue in a stinging aphorism: “Rabid dogs have a fear of water, tyrants have a fear of words.” (“Vodoboiazn’ – u sobak. Slovoboiazn’ – u tiranov.”)²⁷⁴ This echoed Gippius’ view that the restriction of freedom of expression was a direct reflection of lack of political freedom. All three symbolists also attended a meeting in defence of the free word that was arranged in Petrograd by the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries on the same day as *Gazeta-Protest* was published.²⁷⁵ A demand was made for imprisoned journalists and members of the Provisional Government to be freed, an issue which was dear to Gippius, as several of her acquaintances were among the prisoners.

270 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 65 (“Znaiu, Gospodi, – budet nad Rus’iu chudo...”).

271 Z. Gippius, “Krasnaia stena”, *Gazeta-Protest* 26.11.1917.

272 F. Sologub, “Puti istorii, kak prezhdë, ochen’ skol’zki...” *Ibid.*

273 Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 357.

274 *Gazeta-Protest* 26.11.1917.

275 Gippius, “Chernye tetradi Zinaidy Gippius”, pp. 23, 133–4. Gor’kii had also promised to appear, but at the very last moment he backed out (*ibid.*).

The Moscow symbolists Viacheslav Ivanov and Konstantin Bal'mont were not involved in the Petrograd publication *Gazeta-Protest*, but they shared their fellow symbolists' concern.²⁷⁶ Bal'mont demanded complete freedom of expression in several articles,²⁷⁷ and he had the courage to defend the freedom of literature from political demands at a meeting called by the Bolshevik Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii.²⁷⁸ No vital information concerning Russia should be withheld from its citizens; otherwise they would be back in the deplorable mental slavery of the tsarist era.²⁷⁹ Viacheslav Ivanov drew the same parallel to the old regime in his poem "The Vicious Circle" ("Porochnyi krug"), written on 6 December, apparently for a meeting in defence of freedom of expression. The disconcerting fact that Russian writers were again forced to fight censorship reinforced in him doubts about the nature of the revolutionary process that had started in early 1917. It seemed as if the grandeur of Russia had been lost in February, with nothing but its vices retained from the old system:

Cursing at the old glory,
we preserved one thing, the inglorious;
having done away with a native power,
we left autocratic power.*²⁸⁰

Three symbolists – Blok, Belyi and Briusov – did not display any anxiety about the attack upon freedom of expression. Gripped by apocalyptic expectations, Blok and Belyi did not care much for what they saw as voices of the past; but Briusov's passivity was more unexpected. An outspoken defender of free speech in 1905, he now showed solidarity with those in power. In the summer of 1918 he began to work at the Department for Press and Literature of the Moscow Soviet, supervising all publications and thereby, as Gippius observed, actively participating in the final liquidation of a free Russian press.²⁸¹ Blok and Belyi had been included in Gippius' list of renegades, when she commented on the attitude of Russian writers to the October revolution in January

²⁷⁶ Ivanov's, Bal'mont's and Baltrushaitis' protest against censorship was the single-issue publication *Slovu – svoboda!* on 10 December 1917.

²⁷⁷ Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, pp. 31–2 ("Ili-ili"), 46 ("Svoboda slova").

²⁷⁸ Orlov, *Pereput'ia*, p. 209.

²⁷⁹ Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, pp. 31–2 ("Ili-ili").

* "Rugaias' nad staroiu slavo/, Odno sberegli my – besslav'e;/ Pokonchiv s rodimoi derzhavoi,/ Ostavili – samoderzhav'e."

²⁸⁰ Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 69 ("Porochnyi krug").

²⁸¹ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 56.

1918.²⁸² For her they were both “lost children”, led astray by cunning Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Belyi’s behaviour did not come as a surprise, since Gippius, in spite of her personal liking for him, had always considered him totally irresponsible. Spiritually he lived in a fourth dimension, but of necessity he acted in the same three dimensions as other people, with results of a revolting and disastrous character.²⁸³ She found the case of Blok more upsetting, and she was to return to it many times during the following months. Blok’s and Belyi’s fraternizing with the Bolsheviks was for Gippius not so much a political step as a religious fall. Blok and Belyi are obviously the “lost lambs” that Christ is searching for in her poem “There walked...” (1918, “Shel...”), searching without hope of ever finding them again.²⁸⁴

Aleksandr Blok apparently approved of the Bolshevik seizure of power almost immediately, as he agreed, just a few weeks later, to go to the Smol’nyi Institute, to discuss cultural politics at the invitation of the Central All-Russian Executive Committee, newly elected by the Second Congress of Soviets.²⁸⁵ The situation was reminiscent of Kerenskii’s meeting with Merezhkovskii after the February revolution, only then it was the Minister who came to the symbolist writer to ask for his assistance. Now Blok hastened to the political headquarters to assure those in authority of his support.

When Blok endorsed, without any visible hesitation, a regime whose program was as yet very vague, it was not a question of opportunism, as there was no guarantee that Soviet power would last for long. Blok had been calling for a radicalization of the revolutionary process all through 1917, detecting frightening signs of the old bourgeois mentality everywhere. Another reason for supporting the Bolsheviks was their attitude to the World War. As Blok had explained to a shocked Gippius over the telephone shortly before the coup, Lenin was the only politician to call for an immediate end to the war.²⁸⁶ The Peace Decree, that was passed shortly after the coup, showed that these had not been empty words.

Still Blok was not only supporting a visible political revolution. In a symbolist fashion, he envisaged a parallel spiritual revolution, as yet perceptible only to the few. He explained to a puzzled Bolshevik veteran that he was interested in “the soul of the revolution” and that precisely the soul of the October

282 Gippius, “Chernye tetradi Zinaidy Gippius”, p. 57.

283 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, pp. 380-1.

284 Z.N. Gippius, *Stikhi: Dnevnik 1911-1921* (Berlin, 1922), pp. 92-3 (“Shel...”).

285 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, pp. 577-8 n. 2.

286 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 312.

revolution was beautiful.²⁸⁷ Where others saw only ordinary Red Guards, Blok perceived angel wings on their shoulders.²⁸⁸ This comment foreshadowed the religious vision of the verse epic *The Twelve* (*Dvenadtsat'*, 1918), but it was also a concealed reply to a poem by Nikolai Gumilev. In Gumilev's "War" ("Voina"), published in 1914 in the same issue of the journal *Otechestvo* as some letters from the front by Blok's wife, he could find the lines, "Seraphim, bright and winged,/ are visible over the soldiers' shoulders" ("Serafimy, iasny i krylaty,/ Za plechami voinov vidny").²⁸⁹ Blok's reply to Gumilev implied that the heavenly forces were not with the soldiers of the World War, but with those who were bringing about the October revolution in opposition to the war.

During the World War and the February revolution Blok had mostly remained silent about contemporary events, uncertain about his own spontaneous feelings and the attitude of the masses; but now he was filled with certainty that the October revolution was the great event that he had been anticipating for almost a decade. In 1914, Briusov had quoted Tiutchev's words about the blessing of being a witness to historical events. Now it was Blok's turn to remember these lines,²⁹⁰ indirectly claiming that the revolution, not the World War, was one of the greatest moments in history. He applied to the October revolution predictions that others had voiced in connection with the World War. The world was entering its apocalyptic phase, and the end of history was drawing closer.²⁹¹ The old world was to be destroyed and something completely new would emerge. Blok's expectations for Russia were as boundlessly optimistic as Sologub's had been at the earliest stage of the World War: "(...) our false, dirty, boring, ugly life must become a just, clean, happy and beautiful life."²⁹² Individualism would be overcome through collectivism, and, as if appealing to the two main symbolist advocates of collective feeling, Ivanov and Merezhkovskii, Blok wrote: "Revolution means not I, but we. Reaction is loneliness (...)."²⁹³

In January 1918, Blok published a new article, "The Intelligentsia and the Revolution" ("Intelligentsiia i revoliutsiia"). It was the first public apologia for

287 *Aleksandr Blok v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, vol. II, p. 183 (P. Lebedev-Polianskii, "Iz vstrech s A. Blokom").

288 Quoted in Mochul'skii, *Aleksandr Blok*, p. 397.

289 N. Gumilev, *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, vol. I (Washington, 1962), p. 213 ("Voina").

290 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VI, p. 11 ("Intelligentsiia i revoliutsiia").

291 Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 384.

292 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VI, p. 12.

293 *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 328.

the October revolution to come from a major Russian writer. The heart of the article was a plea to the intelligentsia to accept the revolution. Blok did not offer any factual arguments, but reminded his readers of what he hoped was a shared hatred of the old, tsarist Russia and the World War, "the European slaughter", and asked for faith in the radical spirit of bolshevism. Blok trusted his intuition, and he invited others to do the same: "Listen to the Revolution with all your body, all your heart, all your consciousness."²⁹⁴ Sceptical after their many disappointments connected with the World War, the majority of the symbolists were, however, careful not to be carried away by new predictions, and Blok's article met with no sympathy.

In November 1917, the election to the Constituent Assembly was held. Zinaida Gippius viewed the forthcoming assembly as the culmination of a century-long struggle for democracy, but she had no illusions about its chances of coming into existence. Many political parties were forbidden, only Bolshevik propaganda was permitted, and the Bolsheviks threatened in advance to close the Constituent Assembly if its composition was not to their liking.²⁹⁵ "What have we done to it?" ("Chto my s nim sdelali?"), Gippius asked gloomily in a poem written during the elections.²⁹⁶ In spite of her misgivings, she actively supported the Socialist Revolutionaries, writing on request a declaration to be read at the opening of the assembly.²⁹⁷ Her work was in vain, as the Constituent Assembly was dispersed on the orders of the Bolshevik Central Committee on its first day in January 1918.

The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly left another symbolist, Aleksandr Blok, unconcerned. The critic Leonid Dolgoplov is right in saying that Blok saw the Constituent Assembly as a symbol of the old Russia and as such only deserving to be destroyed;²⁹⁸ but it should be added that, like the Bolsheviks, Blok also found the assembly lacking in radicalism and therefore of no importance. He had praised democracy at the time of the February revolution, but he had now reached the conclusion that European parliamentarianism was corrupt. Its basic idea – the delegation of power to an elected representative body – was unacceptable. What Blok advocated was not dictatorship, but some form of anarchism: "I answer for myself."²⁹⁹

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 20.

²⁹⁵ Gippius, "Chernye tetrad Zinaidy Gippius", p. 21.

²⁹⁶ Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, p. 150 ("U.S.").

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 305; Gippius, "Chernye tetrad Zinaidy Gippius", p. 39.

²⁹⁸ Dolgoplov, *Poema Aleksandra Bloka "Dvenadsat"*, p. 24.

²⁹⁹ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 315. See also vol. VI, p. 14.

Blok was not deterred by the outbursts of violence and vandalism that made even Maksim Gor'kii worry and hesitate in his loyalties towards the socialist government. The riots were understandable against the background of the hatred that had emerged from the conflict between the people and the privileged classes.³⁰⁰ In an unsent letter to Gippius, Blok explained the destructive forces of the revolution as merely "October grimaces", insignificant in comparison to the "October grandeur".³⁰¹ Gippius had been struck with amazement at hearing Blok's confession of sympathy for the Bolsheviks, and Blok seems similarly to have been genuinely astonished to realize that the Russian intelligentsia, including most of the symbolists, repudiated the October revolution either by words or in silence. Blok's tone turned harsh, when he commented on the position of his fellow-writers. The Russian intelligentsia had been the prophet of revolution, but when the true revolution finally occurred, the intelligentsia repudiated it. The fact that so many had accepted – and still accepted – the "dissonances" of the World War, while rejecting the "harmonies" of the October revolution was for Blok a question of a lack of intuition and utopian longing, and not a question of political or moral principles. With its lack of a "vital discomfort"³⁰² and a willingness to reform itself, the intelligentsia had turned out to be no better than "the bourgeois scum". Blok must have been depressed by Merezhkovskii's and Sologub's indignant protest in January 1918 against the government's decision to take over all literary rights immediately after a writer's death. Blok conceived all concerns for private property as symptoms of a bourgeois mentality, especially unworthy of a writer.³⁰³ "That is how it should be. A poet should not own anything", was Blok's comment, when he learned that his estate had been ransacked by the revolutionary mob.³⁰⁴

In *The Twelve*, also dating from January 1918, Blok depicted how the miraculous transfiguration of the revolution occurs, as "pure destruction turns into creation".³⁰⁵ As if answering Merezhkovskii, he showed that Christ was indeed involved in the October revolution, that it did have a spiritual and even an eschatological dimension.³⁰⁶ Most of Blok's old friends, including

300 *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 16.

301 *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 336.

302 *Ibid.*, p. 315.

303 *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 7, 496 ("O prave literaturnogo nasledstva: Otvet na anketu"); *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 92:II, p. 169.

304 Quoted in Vl. Orlov, *Gamaun: Zhizn' Aleksandra Bloka* (Leningrad, 1980), p. 586.

305 Mochul'skii, *Aleksandr Blok*, p. 401.

306 For a discussion of *The Twelve*, and especially its Christ figure, see Evgeniia Ivanova, *Aleksandr Blok: Poslednie gody zhizni* (Saint Petersburg-Moscow, 2012), pp. 152-67.

Merezhkovskii, Gippius and Sologub, reacted with dismay to *The Twelve* and the article "The Intelligentsia and the Revolution". For Ivanov, Blok's way displayed apostasy,³⁰⁷ while Sologub interpreted *The Twelve* as a capitulation before the destructive forces of the revolution. He saw a sinister connection between Blok's verbal attacks on the church and the devastation of the Aleksandr Nevskii monastery on the day the article was published.³⁰⁸ The Merezhkovskiis found the article sincere but unforgivable.³⁰⁹ Gippius was at this time concerned with the fate of political prisoners, including Mikhail Tereshchenko, Blok's by now forgotten acquaintance. This was an issue that Blok did not pay any attention to, just as he had not sensed the implications of Bolshevik attacks upon freedom of the press. He was unmoved by criticism, as he was convinced that truth was on his side. His populist sympathies and stature as something of a national poet, combined with a complete trust in his own "musicality", gave him a comfortable feeling of superiority over his colleagues: "Ladies and gentlemen, you have never known Russia and you have never loved it! Home truths are hard to swallow."³¹⁰

The Russo-German peace talks started in Brest-Litovsk on 3 (16) December 1917. The German conditions were unacceptable to the Russian side, and on 5 (18) January the negotiations were broken off as pointless. Three weeks later the Russian delegation, headed by Lev Trotskii, tried a policy of declaring that Russia was withdrawing from the war without signing a peace treaty. The "no war – no peace" declaration did not have the planned effect upon European workers and soldiers, and the German army soon resumed its invasion of Russia. Faced by the threat of occupation, the Russian government announced its readiness to accept peace on the enemy's terms. The Central Committee of the Bolshevik party accepted the new terms at a point when the enemy was already at the gates of Petrograd. A peace treaty was finally signed in Brest-Litovsk on 3 (16) March. A historian summarizes the resulting defeat: "Russia lost one-third, or sixty-two million, of her population, one-quarter of her territory, one-third of her crop-lands, twenty-seven per cent of her income, and more than half her industries."³¹¹ This was, in fact, a much harder peace than even Valerii Briusov had pessimistically foreseen and rejected as completely unacceptable in his booklet *How to End the War*.

³⁰⁷ Averintsev, p. 52.

³⁰⁸ Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 321.

³⁰⁹ Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki*, p. 385.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

³¹¹ Moorehead, p. 280.

Gippius followed the peace negotiations with close attention. Even if she realized that Russia was by now unable to wage a war and was thus not in a position to dictate peace terms, she still rejected the peace treaty as the most shameful imaginable.³¹² It meant a victory not for peace but for war, as bolshevism, by its very nature, was equal to “permanent war”,³¹³ the continuation of war under the mask of revolution.³¹⁴ Gippius, too, now felt a concern for the fate of Russia's allies. The peace signified a betrayal of the Allied Powers, meaning that French and British soldiers who fell at the front would from now on also be indirectly killed by Russians.³¹⁵

Blok reacted to the peace negotiations in a very different vein. The thought that England, France and Germany were deaf to the Bolshevik call for peace, even after over three years of war, aroused his indignation. At this moment, when the Soviet government was facing a deadly threat from the German invasion, Blok made his major appearance as a political poet during the World War. His argument was initially formulated in his diary on 7 January: “If you do not wash away the shame of your war patriotism with ‘a democratic peace’, if you destroy our revolution, then you are not *Aryans any longer*. Then we will open wide the gates to the East.”³¹⁶ The bizarre idea that the European states could be blackmailed into ending the war with the help of “the Yellow peril” was further developed in the poem “The Scythians”. Russia was both Europe and Asia, but if Europe did not come to its senses, Russia, weakened by the war, would stop functioning as a defensive wall against Asia. Instead of Russian love and all-humanity, the Europeans would see a barbaric Asian Russia, which would watch passively as the “Mongols” devastated European civilization.

“The Scythians” appeared in *Znamia truda*, the organ of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, where Ivanov-Razumnik was editing the literary section. Blok was pressing for the poem's publication: German troops were steadily advancing towards Petrograd, and he viewed “The Scythians” as part of the capital's defence.³¹⁷ The poem was published on 7 (20) February, the same day as the newspapers announced that the Soviet government was prepared to accept peace on German conditions. Blok's diary reveals that he was able to see the wisdom of Lenin's decision. He had in fact prepared himself for such an end to

312 Gippius, “Chernye tetradi Zinaidy Gippius”, pp. 37, 72.

313 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. I, pp. 152–3 (“Ona”).

314 Gippius, “Chernye tetrazy Zinaidy Gippius”, p. 66.

315 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 361.

316 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 317.

317 *Pamiati Aleksandra Bloka*, p. 57.

the war almost a year earlier, when he expressed his readiness to accept even the most ignominious peace. For him it was the war that was a disgrace and not the peace, whatever forms it took.³¹⁸ Patriotism was but a cover-up for imperialism.³¹⁹ The socialist government had to be rescued, so that the revolution could gradually acquire a universal dimension, and no sacrifices were too great for this purpose: "(...) one has to bury fatherland, honour, morality, law, patriotism and other corpses, so that *the music can be reconciled* with the world."³²⁰ As stated in "The Scythians", the world revolution, which ultimately included a future revolution of the spirit, was contingent upon immediate peace. The Brest-Litovsk Treaty thus left Blok's utopian dreams intact, even if it meant the end of hope for immediate radical changes.³²¹

In 1933 Andrei Belyi wrote that he had greeted the October revolution "with joy".³²² He revealed this sympathy publicly for the first time in the article "The Sirin of Learned Barbarism" ("Sirin uchenogo varvarstva"), published in March 1918. Formally it was a review of Viacheslav Ivanov's book *Native and Universal*. Belyi had been in Switzerland, when Ivanov's articles were originally published, but the publication of the book offered him an opportunity to clarify his opinion. The result was a pamphlet, in which Belyi commented not only on Ivanov's philosophy, but also on the World War and the October revolution. The fact that four years later Belyi published his article separately, shows the importance he attached to it.³²³

Belyi started by respectfully praising Ivanov's versatility and erudition as a poet, philologist and philosopher. After this the kind words end and a veritable execution of his symbolist colleague begins. In the first chapter Ivanov was called a "learned poet", but now he is turned into a "learned barbarian", who developed a "monstrous ideology" and a "cannibalistic interpretation of Orthodoxy" during the World War.³²⁴ Ivanov's ideology was based upon human sacrifice, but, unlike the Frenchman René Lote, whom Belyi had criticized while still in Switzerland, this was meant not only figuratively, but also

318 Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 317.

319 *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 326.

320 *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 329.

321 *Pamiati Aleksandra Bloka*, p. 59; Blok, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. VII, p. 329.

322 Belyi, "O sebe kak pisatele", p. 326.

323 Heinrich A. Stammeler ("Belyi's Conflict with Vjacheslav Ivanov over War and Revolution", *The Slavic and East-European Journal* 18 /1974/, no. 3, p. 263) in his analysis of Belyi's attack on Ivanov assumes, that "Sirin uchenogo varvarstva" was written in Berlin in 1922, an error which leads him to partly misunderstand Belyi's intentions.

324 Belyi, *Sirin uchenogo varvarstva*, p. 14.

literally. “Learned barbarian” was what the neo-Slavophiles, and the Russian nationalists in general, had called the Germans, but it could better be applied to Ivanov. In his review, Belyi used the method of “defamiliarization” and read Ivanov’s *Native and Universal* with a feigned ignorance of the ideological and historical tradition that underpinned its concepts. The device was brilliant but treacherous, if one bears in mind that it was being used by a writer, who could himself have been an easy target in this respect. Belyi’s main accusation was that Ivanov, who not only offered a theory to explain why the World War should be accepted, but even presented the war as something necessary and positive, had not made a simple truth clear to himself and to his readers, namely that war ultimately amounted to killing. Belyi was returning to his initial reaction to the war, expressed in his letter to his mother in 1914: “Blood is flowing.”³²⁵

Only now, when Russia’s participation in the World War had officially ended, did Belyi publicly voice his opinion of the war. The war was a “horrible, accursed, monstrous, inhuman slaughter”, which had brought death to millions of innocent people. To support the war was consequently to be an “apologist for murder”.³²⁶ Ivanov was guilty of exhorting others to shed human blood, without himself taking part, and of concealing a terrible reality with the help of “the most mawkish, sentimental words”,³²⁷ as when, for example, the bloodshed of the war was interpreted as Holy Communion.³²⁸ From this point in his article, Belyi consistently calls the war slaughter and murder, something which makes Ivanov’s every utterance look ugly and suspect. According to Ivanov, the war had been essential for the Slavonic peoples and, furthermore, an expression of “the will of the people”.³²⁹ Belyi’s counter-question was naturally why the universal mission of the Slavs had to be carried out through fratricide and why their “cause” had to be a “bloody cause”.³³⁰

Belyi’s conclusion was crushing: “The cross of Christ is with us, Ivanov exclaims; I think it is not the cross of Christ but the axe of a cannibal (...).”³³¹ A true bearer of culture had to repudiate war and not combine Christian notions with calls to murder. In Belyi’s mind, Ivanov was a Sirin, the bird of

³²⁵ See p. 187.

³²⁶ Belyi, *Sirin uchenogo varvarstva*, p. 10.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 23.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–4.

paradise, which according to Russian mythology descended to earth and enchanted people with its song. But just like the sirens of classical mythology, this Sirin was trying to lead people astray.³³² Belyi was also making an allusion to Merezhkovskii's words about naive Russian patriotic poets, "nightingales over blood".

Belyi's article has been seen as a "bombastic and treacherous" lampoon, a disgrace for its author,³³³ presumably because of its conspicuously late date and crude personal accusations. It would doubtless have looked better, had Belyi attacked Russian nationalism in general, without naming names. His criticism could be applied not only to Ivanov, but to Sologub and Bal'mont as well. But Belyi had his special reasons for singling Ivanov out. Ivanov had always been of great importance to him, both as a writer and a thinker, and during the war Ivanov became of immediate concern, as Belyi was asked to write about him for a history of contemporary Russian literature.³³⁴ Furthermore, in "The Sirin of Learned Barbarism" Belyi was not just concerned with the World War, but he also took the opportunity of including the October revolution. To be sure, all the articles in Ivanov's *Native and Universal* had been written before October, but Belyi was aware that Ivanov had adopted a decisive standpoint against the Bolshevik takeover. The combination of a "yes" to the war and a "no" to the revolution infuriated Belyi, just as it had infuriated Blok. The "slaughter" was called a "universal cause", while the October revolution, the gate to a new world, was seen as a catastrophe. Belyi must have expected that Ivanov, as the third of the "younger symbolists", and a poet whose predictions about the future had once been received with reverence, ought to have been able to detect the true essence of events.

It would be a mistake to think of Belyi as having been totally unaware of or indifferent to the Bolsheviks' political programme. His *Revolution and Culture* testifies that the demand for the socialization of the means of production, the nationalities policy, internationalism, the central role of the Soviets, and the outspoken will for peace received his full support. But as the 1905 revolution had shown, Belyi perceived socialism mainly as an expression of an ethical and therefore also a religious wish to transform society.³³⁵ Economic reforms were not sufficient when individualism had to be defeated. The religious and apocalyptic element that Belyi had not found in the World War and the February

332 Stammer, p. 265.

333 Mochul'skii, *Andrei Belyi*, p. 251.

334 Andrei Belyi, "Viacheslav Ivanov", in *Russkaia literatura XX veka: 1890-1910*, vol. III, part 2, book 8 (Moscow, [1917]), pp. 114-49.

335 Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, p. 30.

revolution seemed to him to be present in the October revolution.³³⁶ Only after the Bolshevik coup can a new turn be detected in Belyi's thinking towards an optimistic belief in the capacity of man to overcome his fateful dualism and create a new kind of human community. It was a sense of a new "dawn" that emerged in 1918 in connection with Belyi's mystical interpretation of the October revolution.

According to Belyi, it was the October revolution, and not the World War, that promised to realize everything that Ivanov – and Belyi, as well, for that matter – had been longing for. Behind the program of the Soviet regime Belyi saw a spiritual reality that could easily be translated into the language of the symbolists. The "revolutionary, spiritual maximalism" that Ivanov and Belyi had found so attractive in Nietzsche, Ibsen, Dostoevskii and Tolstoi, was present in the Bolshevik revolution. The governmental principle of national self-determination was a manifestation of "the brotherhood of peoples",³³⁷ now on a broader scale than the Dornach community, and it provided examples of how Ivanov's ideal of *sobornost'*, the spiritual community, was to be fulfilled in practice. Belyi had also dreamt of a religious community that would demand no sacrifice of individual freedom and that was to be based upon an organic and not a mechanistic relationship between its members. Even if he had called it *obshchina*, community, it fundamentally resembled Ivanov's utopia, *sobornost'*.³³⁸

Ivanov had placed an emphasis on "orchestrae", a word originally denoting the place of the chorus in the Hellenic theatre, but which Ivanov used in the sense of the active involvement of the people in the leadership of the community. Prior to the 1905 revolution Belyi had accepted Ivanov's notion of "orchestrae" as a form of nation-wide suffrage and democracy, an organic part of the coming universal mystery, but he soon dismissed the concept, as it appeared to have been vulgarized in the form of the State Duma, one of the results of that revolution.³³⁹ Now Belyi found the idea of "orchestrae" realized in the Soviets that were spreading across the whole of Russia. All this meant that one of the main contradictions from which modern man suffered – the split between the individual and society – could now be resolved.

The October revolution thus contained a spiritual impulse, the seed from which the future would grow. If Ivanov failed to see the transcendent meaning

336 Belyi, *Sirin uchenogo varvarstva*, p. 19.

337 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

338 Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, p. 30.

339 Ivanov-Razumnik, "Andrei Belyi", in *Russkaia literatura XX veka: 1890-1910*, vol. III, part 2, book 7 /Moscow, [1916]/, p. 35.

behind events, it was because of his false attitude to life. In a private letter to Ivanov, he accused him of living an “egoistic, comfortable life”, without love and sacrifices. In the Ivanov of 1917, he found, in fact, more of the ego-futurist Igor’ Severianin’s “pineapples in champagne”, the symbol of triteness and spiritual poverty, than of genuine symbolist stature.³⁴⁰ Belyi’s ideal was total emotional and spiritual involvement in events, the “life-creating” attitude that was part of the symbolist outlook, as this was the only way of getting a true understanding of the processes at work. According to Belyi’s startling explanation, Ivanov’s thought was ruled by a materialistic, and thus not a symbolist, approach to existence. Where the materialist saw only destruction and chaos, the idealist sensed a death that would create a new life.³⁴¹ Belyi called Ivanov a “materialist of culture”, an epithet that could have been applied to himself as well, since he had refused to see anything but devastation and death in the World War, rejecting all interpretations of the war as a creative force. Only in 1918 was Belyi ready to do what others had done in August 1914 and February 1917, namely to look for a secret meaning beyond what the eye could see. After the October revolution, it was Belyi and Blok who adopted the role of Sirins, trying to seduce others to disregard the material side of life and the frightening present, and to trust their intuition and adopt an optimistic view of the historical process.

In Belyi’s new poems the visionary element was strong: he “saw” and “heard” the future. Retrospectively, he claimed already to have had premonitions of the coming “Radiant Testament (*Svetlyi Zavet*)”, a word reminiscent of Merezhkovskii’s apocalyptic terminology, during the war (“Sovremennikam”).³⁴² In the poem “The Dove” (“Golub”), a dove descends from heaven. At one level, it is the dove of peace, as the poem was written shortly after the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, but it also symbolizes the coming of the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit, “the Third Testament”, that Belyi, just like Merezhkovskii, had looked forward to and which he now connected with the coming of peace. The dream of universal brotherhood, which had always been at the core of Belyi’s symbolism, was being fulfilled. Like Blok, Belyi viewed with contempt European parliamentarianism, with its “repellent gradualness (*postepenshchina*)”, dreaming instead of a leap from the uncontrolled elements to the Era of Reason.³⁴³ In his concept of three revolutions, a political,

340 Quoted in Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, p. 615 comm. 233 (letter to Ivanov, 1917).

341 Belyi, *Sirin uchenogo varvarstva*, pp. 18-9.

342 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 419 (“Sovremennikam”).

343 Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman “Peterburg”*, p. 368.

social and spiritual,³⁴⁴ the February revolution had the function of a political revolution, while the October revolution was simultaneously a social revolution and the beginning of the final, spiritual revolution, which would defeat the materialist world-view and lead to “the realm of freedom” and the infinite growth of man’s spiritual potential.³⁴⁵ The reason for the crisis that Europe was going through was to be sought in human consciousness, and therefore only the third, spiritual revolution could heal and transfigure the world.³⁴⁶

A synthesis of all the beliefs and hopes that inspired Belyi at the time of the October revolution is contained in his long poem *Christ Is Risen* (*Khristos voskres*), published in May 1918. In the first part of the poem, Belyi depicts the crucifixion of Christ on a realistic plane, leading up to a death that leaves no hope of resurrection. In the second part, we see a mystical re-enactment of Christ’s passion in modern times, this time ending in resurrection and transfiguration. According to Belyi, the theme of *Christ Is Risen* was “the Golgotha of consciousness”.³⁴⁷ Not only the individual ego, but also the collective ego, that is both the national and the universal soul of mankind, had been “crucified”, but were now rising to a new life. The poem was thus another illustration of the crisis in the consciousness of modern man, now with an added visionary solution. Belyi had come to share Rudolf Steiner’s – and, without admitting it, also Fedor Sologub’s – view of history as a “process of cosmic evolution punctuated by violent periods of transition”.³⁴⁸ The split within man was to be overcome with the help of both individual and historical crises.³⁴⁹

In *Christ Is Risen* the theme of resurrection and salvation is connected not only with the human ego in general, but also with Russia and the October revolution. Belyi, who only a year earlier had ridiculed the neo-Slavophile mode of thinking, now gave full rein to his own messianic fantasies. At the moment when “the World Mystery” was being fulfilled, Russia was playing a crucial role.³⁵⁰ In *Christ Is Risen*, Russia is first equated with a grave, then envisioned as the Bride and the Wife, religious symbols taken over from Solov’ev, and finally as the God-bearer, defeating the Serpent.³⁵¹ The notion that Russia was

344 Belyi shared this view with Ivanov-Razumnik (Ivanov-Razumnik, *Pered grozoi: 1916-1917 g.* (Petrograd, 1928), p. 131).

345 Belyi, *Sirin uchenogo varvarstva*, p. 18; Belyi, *Pochemu ia stal simvolistom...*, p. 103.

346 Fedjuschin, p. 244.

347 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 349 (“Khristos voskres”). First publ. in *Znamia truda* 12.5.1918 199.

348 K[enneth] N. B[rostrom], “Bely, Andrei”, in *Handbook of Russian Literature* (New Haven and London, 1985), p. 46.

349 Dolgopолоv, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman “Peterburg”*, p. 360.

350 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 360 (“Khristos voskres”).

351 *Ibid.*, p. 370.

the Chosen Nation, “the darling of heaven”, can also be found in the poems “To the Native Country” (“Rodine”)³⁵² and “To the Infant” (“Mladentsu”)³⁵³.

In 1914, Fedor Sologub had branded all doubts concerning the strength and approaching victory of Russia as spiritual treason. Now it was Blok’s and Belyi’s turn to attack unbelief and scepticism. A representative of the Russian intelligentsia appears in *Christ Is Risen*, stooping, weak, bespectacled, and, worst of all, deaf to “the message of the Spring”. At a time when Konstantin Bal’mont had long ago rejected his cherished symbol of spring, having seen it turn into autumn, Belyi picked it up and attached it to the hopes raised by the October revolution. The outsider in his *Christ Is Risen* does not comprehend the mystery of resurrection and salvation that is performed both within man and in the external world, but keeps on muttering something about Constantinople and the Straits, revealing his attachment to false goals. A parallel has been drawn between this character and the bourgeois poet in Blok’s *The Twelve*,³⁵⁴ but Belyi surely had enough suitable living models to choose among. The figure can be identified as a Cadet defending the interests of the Russian bourgeoisie,³⁵⁵ or, more concretely, as Pavel Miliukov, who during his short period as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the spring of 1917 had obstinately defended Russia’s right to Constantinople.³⁵⁶ But it seems most likely that Belyi was once more attacking Ivanov, an ardent believer in the dream of a Russian Constantinople. The intellectual’s blindness is presented as the result of his refusal to turn inward and conduct spiritual self-searching, and the solution Belyi offers is, again, “Oh, Man, know thyself!”³⁵⁷

It is no wonder that *Christ Is Risen* was seen as proof that Belyi had joined the ranks of the Bolsheviks.³⁵⁸ In the poem the October revolution is presented as the beginning of a religious and spiritual rebirth of humankind. Even the

352 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 463 (“Rodine” / “Rydai, burevaia stihkiia...” /).

353 *Ibid.*, p. 462 (“Mladentsu”).

354 Boris Christa, *The Poetic World of Andrey Bely* (Amsterdam, 1977), p. 113; M. P’ianikh, “Poeziia A. Belogo revoliutsionnoi epokhi 1917-1921 godov”, in Belyi, *Problemy tvorchestva*, p. 260.

355 Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, p. 619 comm. 263.

356 In his memoirs (Andrei Belyi, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii* / Moscow, 1989/, pp. 47, 469 n. 48) Belyi himself connected Pavel Miliukov with Constantinople and the Straits.

357 Belyi, *Na perevale: Krizis zhizni*, p. 5 (“Vmesto predisloviia”).

358 In the foreword written for the Berlin edition of *Khristos voskres* in 1923, Belyi firmly rejected the tendency to read everything written after the October revolution as belonging to the categories of pro-bolshevism or anti-bolshevism. He dismissed as “nonsense” the reading of his poem as a political statement (*Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 350), since he wanted to see himself as above all a representative of a spiritual consciousness and anthro-

imminent Civil War is given a positive function, as a Russia torn to pieces by fighting would only be repeating the drama of Christ. Russia fulfilled its messianic mission by walking the road to Golgotha. Sologub, among others, had formulated the same thought three years earlier in connection with the World War. Now it was revived by Belyi, presumably under the influence of the Scythians. Belyi's *Christ Is Risen* can also be read as a comment on Ivanov's new poems "Songs of the Time of Troubles" and "Lazarus" ("Lazar"). Whereas Ivanov equated the Second Coming with the overthrow of Bolshevik power, Belyi claimed that the October revolution was a partial fulfillment of the symbolists' messianic yearnings. A hidden polemic with Dmitrii Merezhkovskii can also be detected. In 1887, Merezhkovskii had written a poem with the same title, "Christ Is Risen" ("Khristos voskres"). In the spring of 1918, the poem was recited publicly in Petrograd, thereby acquiring a new actuality and significance. Where Belyi saw Christ's resurrection as having been revived by contemporary political events in Russia, Merezhkovskii's poem expressed a loss of belief. At a time "When brother hated brother, when man was disgraced" ("Kak brata brat voznenavidel, kak opozoren chelovek"), the Easter message, "Christ Is risen", sounds like an insult and would have reduced Christ to tears.³⁵⁹ In the second stanza, Merezhkovskii had initially predicted a future, in which there would be neither "masters" nor "slaves", but after the October revolution, he omitted this, now inappropriate, revolutionary thought.³⁶⁰ As a result, Merezhkovskii's "Christ Is Risen" was turned into a bitter condemnation of Russia's new "masters", something which the audience also realized. Gippius claims that the actor who recited the poem in 1918 did so at the risk of his life.³⁶¹

The third symbolist to lend the Bolsheviks his support was Valerii Briusov. After *How to End the War* he had lapsed into a prolonged silence. No immediate comments by him on the October revolution can be found. The dissolution

posophy, an outlook that could not easily be united with political catchwords. He now attributed his silence in 1918, when his name was linked to the Bolsheviks, to the demands of the time. The true explanation was that Belyi's attitude to the revolution had significantly changed in 1923 and it was from this new standpoint that he now read his "Christ Is Risen". The religious fervor associated with the October revolution had passed, and Belyi had not yet even decided whether to return to Russia and make peace with the Soviet authorities or to remain in Germany.

359 Dmitrii Sergeevich Merezhkovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. XXII (Moskva, 1914), pp. 64-5.

360 *Iz russkikh poetov*. Kniga dlia vsekh, no. 1 (Berlin, 1921), p. 61.

361 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, pp. 303-4.

of the Constituent Assembly passed without any protest. His worst fears were realized in the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty, but, even so, he shortly afterwards went over to the side of the new regime, without giving any public reasons.³⁶² Gippius pointedly, if not quite correctly, commented that Briusov was only preceded by the old Ieronim Iasinskii in joining the Bolsheviks.³⁶³ The example of Iasinskii was not chosen at random: this second-rate writer was notorious for his lack of principles, veering from decadence and the defence of “pure art” to revolutionary engagement. Gippius explained Briusov’s step by his highly ambitious nature and complete indifference to whom he served. Marina Tsvetaeva, a poet without any personal liking for Briusov, paradoxically saw his decision as issuing from a fundamentally conservative nature. Whereas Bal’mont was a poet who turned counter-revolutionary as soon as the revolution succeeded, Briusov represented the type who at the first signs of stabilization joined the victorious side.³⁶⁴ Others have not hesitated to use the word “opportunism” to explain Briusov’s behaviour. The literary historian Gleb Struve writes: “In Bryusov’s adherence to the Revolution the element of calculation and timeserving played a large part. Quickly forgetting the patriotic poems in which he had extolled Russian victories in the war, he now hastened to join the Communist party (...).”³⁶⁵ Ivan Bunin suspected something similar. In January 1918, he wrote in his diary, presumably after a meeting with Briusov:

About Briusov: is moving further and further to the left, “is already almost a genuine Bolshevik”. No surprise. Praised autocracy in 1904, demanded (just like Tiutchev!) that Constantinople should immediately be conquered. In 1905 turned up in Gor’kii’s *Bor’ba* with “The Dagger” (“Kinzhal”).³⁶⁶ Became a jingoist at the beginning of the war with the Germans. Is now a Bolshevik.³⁶⁷

362 Valerii Briusov v avtobiograficheskikh zapisiakh..., pp. 348-9.

363 Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, vol. II, p. 56.

364 Marina Tsvetaeva, *Proza* (Letchworth, Hertfordshire, 1969), p. 141 (“Geroi truda”).

365 Gleb Struve, *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin: 1917-1953* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1971), p. 7.

366 Here Bunin makes a factual error, which, however, does not defeat the inward sense of his words. The poem “Kinzhal” was published in the organ of the symbolists, *Novyi put’* in 1904 (10), while Briusov never participated in *Bor’ba*.

367 I.A. Bunin, *Okaiannye dni: K dvadtsatiletiiu so dnia smerti I.A. Bunina (8 noiabria 1953)* (London, Canada, 1974), p. 6.

Briusov's action in 1918 was indeed contrary to his 1905 declaration of a programmatic disloyalty, but, on the other hand, he had always defended the right to inconsistency and metamorphoses. Briusov's changes of course must also be regarded in the light of his nationalism. His support of the revolution had always emerged as a reaction to what he perceived as national weakness and disgrace. This was the pattern in 1905 and in both February and October of 1917. As Dmitrii Maksimov has pointed out, the October revolution was a symbol of national renaissance for Briusov.³⁶⁸ The Provisional Government had turned out to be as impotent as the tsarist regime, unable to defend the greatness of Russia, but now a great, new national life was born. This was the theme of, for example, the poem "October 1917" ("Oktiabr' 1917 goda") of 1920. The significance of the October revolution was expanded, as Briusov eventually came to regard it as the universal purgatory that the World War had failed to be. In 1924, Briusov even revived the central symbolist term of "transfiguration". That he talked about "a transfigured planet" in connection with the life-work and spiritual heritage of Lenin, shows how far he had travelled since 1917 ("Posle smerti Lenina"). It was indeed an ironic twist of fate that it was Briusov who, last among the symbolists, tried to infuse fresh life into the dream of transfiguration.

Briusov's inner conflict between art and politics was gradually settled in favour of the latter. In 1905, he had been of the opinion that Social Democracy infringed upon the creative freedom of the artist as much as the exploiting classes, but after 1918 he condemned writers who lived and wrote with a lack of concern for socio-political realities. It was in the light of communist ideology that Briusov returned to the World War for one last time. The cycle of poems "The Torch of Thought: A Wreath of Sonnets" ("Svetoch mysli: Venok sonetov") was written in 1918, but only appeared after the writer's death. Man's untiring search for truth is seen as the core of world history. The World War interrupted this process. All four natural elements were mastered by the war, the beast in man awoke, and the nations turned into each other's enemies. However, unconcerned by national aspirations, Fate had its own plans, and the states involved were finally called to account. Human thought had survived the orgy of chaotic instinct, and the people had found their way through the storm towards truth and freedom.³⁶⁹ The role of a representative of culture and spiritual values was natural for Briusov, but the juxtaposition of the rulers' interests and that of the people was clearly a lesson he had learned after October 1917.

³⁶⁸ Maksimov, *Briusov*, p. 227.

³⁶⁹ Briusov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. III, p. 389 ("Svetoch mysli. Venok sonetov: XIV. Mirovaia voina XX veka").

Even when all their hopes and beliefs had been repeatedly crushed, the opponents of the October revolution were still capable of moments of optimism, partly because of a new interpretation of the situation. In her poems of February 1918, Gippius presented the events as a religious drama, where the revolution was a moral crisis and the fall of Russia.³⁷⁰ The people had failed to stand up for freedom and had subsequently been thrown back into slavery ("Veseli'e"). Russia had lost its human traits, but through repentance and an acceptance of the Bolsheviks' rule as a trial, the way to resurrection would be opened up.

Viacheslav Ivanov's "Songs of the Time of Trouble" not only included a prayer for heavenly help, but also the emphatic hope that Russia's present situation would function as a purification. Towards the end of the cycle, the belief that "the stormy elements" would break through and "spring" would arrive, symbols that Ivanov had refrained from employing in connection with the February revolution, grew stronger:

A demon offended Russia's soul, the Church:
the sacred galleys with rippling pennants
have begun to move... Hark: "Christ is risen!"...

And the favorable Spirit breathes faith into the sail...^{*371}

Another lament for Russia, filled with similar yearnings for a divine miracle is contained in the poem "Lazarus". After four days in the grave, the body of Lazarus was already touched by decay, and no hope of defeating death could any longer be entertained. But for Christ nothing is impossible, and Lazarus was called back to life. The four days Lazarus spent in the grave correspond to Russia's four months under the Bolsheviks (the poem was written in February-March 1918), and the poem ends with a prayer for salvation, "The tearful remembrance of the Miracle is with me every day:/ And for my Russia, and for Russia it lasted four days!" ("O Chude pamiat' sleznaia vsednevna:/ I Rus' moia, i Rus' – chetverodnevna!")³⁷²

On 5 February 1918 Konstantin Bal'mont wrote to his first wife, "I believe in the transfiguring power of time and in the creative talent of the Russian

370 See, for example, "Tak est'", "Net", "Imia" and "Dver'" (Gippius, *Zhivye litsa*, pp. 153-6).

* "Obidel dushu Rusi, Tserkov', – bes:/ Podvignulis' sviashchennye galery/ Khorugvei plavnykh... Chu, – "Khristos voskres!"...// I Dukh poputnyi dyshit v parus very..."

371 Ivanov, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. IV, p. 75 ("Pesni smutnogo vremeni").

372 *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 77 ("Lazar").

people.”³⁷³ When the *real* revolution came, the face of the earth would be recreated. Quoting from the Acts of the Apostles, Bal'mont indicated that the present moment was but the prelude to the Second Coming, “the new era of complete spiritual clarity and all-embracing value for all sons of humankind”.³⁷⁴ The Bolsheviks, who suppressed individuality, just like the Germans, and who advocated blind destruction instead of a harmonious transformation, were not genuine revolutionaries. The real revolution would not only destroy the old world, but also create a new one.³⁷⁵

Fedor Sologub had written in early 1918 that Russia would either dissolve and perish, or see a “flourishing of all its creative forces, an event unprecedented in history; a great feat, the holy work of the glorious transformation of Russia”.³⁷⁶ Russia could be transformed through a nationwide deed, implying the overthrow of Bolshevik power. These illusions could not last long. Even Sologub was forced to admit that historical cataclysms did not automatically raise humankind to a higher spiritual level. He wrote around 1920, in an article which had to remain unpublished: “I would believe in the last breath of the old world, if not only the system of governing would change, but also the attitude to life, not only the structure of external life, but also the structure of the soul. And it is precisely this that is not to be seen anywhere or in anyone.”³⁷⁷

The hopes that the World War and the revolutions of 1917 had aroused in the symbolists were gradually extinguished. Blok and Bely, too, went through a painful process of reconsidering their acceptance of the metaphysical side of the October revolution. It was an indirect admission of failure in the impossible task the symbolists had set out to accomplish. Merezhkovskii had formulated the role of the poet in an aphorism in 1915: “The natives of Borneo use glow-worms on sharp poles as candles. This is the fate of writers.”³⁷⁸ This could be seen as more of an invented task than a genuine function. In the end these poets of hope and despair immolated themselves on the stake of humankind when trying to foresee history and lead the way to a brighter future.

373 Quoted in Orlov, *Pereput'ia*, p. 209.

374 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 47 (“Krov' i ogon”).

375 Bal'mont, *Revoliutsioner ia ili net*, p. 3ff.

376 Sologub, “Nabliudeniia i mecht'y o teatre”, p. 2.

377 Quoted in Struve, “Tri sud'by...”, p. 208 (“Chto delat'?”).

378 Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 359.

The Symbolist Experience 1914-1918

“Why the symbolists accepted the war” was the initial title of Sologub’s article of 1916 or 1917 mentioned in the introduction chapter. The formulation was significant, not only because of its unexpected assertion of a common symbolist stand on the war issue, but also because of its ambition, by then rare, to view Russian symbolism as a still vital concept. There were no collective symbolist public appearances, publications or programmatic statements concerning the World War or the revolutions of 1917. The symbolists’ names – or at least the majority of them – were only seen together in connection with charity publications and the defence of oppressed nationalities or freedom of expression. Even where a common line could have been established, the symbolists preferred to stay apart. Gippius recognized an ally only in Merezhkovskii. Ivanov could show respect for the other two Moscow symbolists, Bal’mont and Briusov, but made it clear that he did not consider the latter a symbolist. He praised Bal’mont for his patriotic stance and not for his poetical achievements. Ivanov was in turn fiercely attacked by Belyi, who rejected as false not only his attitude to the war and the revolution but his entire attitude to life. Belyi felt respect for Gippius and Merezhkovskii, but eventually chose to side with the loner Blok. As for Sologub, he felt more at home with writers from outside the symbolist camp. But even if relations between the symbolists were complicated or even strained on the surface, a symbolist view on the World War and the revolutions can be outlined, as Sologub showed. Not all aspects of it were shared collectively, and the emphases and interpretation of certain features differed. The development of individual symbolists also showed distinct differences. Still there was a common vision and dream.

The outbreak of the World War was not exactly what the Russian symbolists had expected of the future, but the grand scale of events was quickly recognized. In his 1914 book on Merezhkovskii, the critic Evgenii Lundberg talked about the writer’s love for “world conflagrations”.¹ Sparks of the same passion could also be found in the other symbolists. Among them these sparks had come to the fore both in connection with the “Dawn feeling” and the 1905 revolution. Theirs was a thirst for great cataclysms, where physical events would pave the way for a radical spiritual metamorphosis. Merezhkovskii talked

¹ Lundberg, p. 4.

about the “intermittent, catastrophic, unexpected, *unforeseen*, that in religion is called ‘Apocalypse’, and in the social sphere ‘revolution’”.² Revolution was equated with religion, and freedom was the uniting word. Freedom had in its turn always been a key word for the symbolists, as the basis of an unrestricted, fearless search for hidden truths.

For a group of writers, who had gradually become concerned with the salvation not only of Russia, but of the whole of humankind, the events of 1914 were bound to be perceived as being full of deep significance and potential power. A worldwide war could obviously serve the same goal as a revolution, bringing with it – directly or indirectly – not only the resolution of strained national conflicts, but also the attainment of a new consciousness and sociality. Beyond the war there lingered the seductive vision of a new heaven and a new earth, the fulfillment of apocalyptic fears and longings. Transfiguration was, indeed, as Sologub had stated, the main word in this connection.

The symbolists tended to view life in collective and universal terms, while the fate of the individual was easily, or even consciously, disregarded. The transfiguration of humanity was connected with the revolution of the spirit, but the concept of man in symbolist thinking was highly abstract. Occupied with war’s religious and collective aspects, the symbolists failed to see its revolting and tragic dimensions. Instead, as in the case of, for example, Blok and Sologub, they cherished the hope that human relations would grow deeper under the influence of war. Initially only Belyi, Gippius and Merezhkovskii showed signs of awareness of the demoralization and suffering that war brought with it, but they, too, remained far from pacifism. Merezhkovskii and Gippius saw the war as the Fall of man and rejected it on religious grounds, but they still accepted it as an undeniable fact and, eventually, as a necessary act in world history. Behind the bloodshed there were processes at work which, if fulfilled, would give meaning to all the sacrifices. The paradox of a simultaneous denial and acceptance, a wish to reconcile that which could not be reconciled, remained alive in Merezhkovskii and Gippius until the end of the war.

The World War thus retained an abstract character for the majority of the symbolists. The exception to the rule might have been Briusov, who as a war correspondent came to see more of front-line reality than the others. Nevertheless, Briusov’s approach to the war was also highly theoretical, and he showed few signs of reliving the war on a subjective, emotional level. The tendency to idealize his own side and demonize the enemy was as strong in him

² Merezhkovskii, *Bylo i budet*, p. 66.

as in those who spent the war years at home. Significantly, Briusov's status as an eyewitness was never recognized by the other symbolists.

In his utopian thinking Briusov was much more moderate and, it must be added, down-to-earth than the other symbolists. In 1914 he did talk about a coming transfigured world, but was rather referring to an adjustment of borders than to changes in the human heart. For Briusov history was not moral, but a struggle in which the strong and large state had the right to extend its domain. Viewed from this angle, the World War was a clash between military blocks for markets and economic influence, and imperialistic goals were a natural part of the drive towards Russian greatness. Peculiar to Briusov was also his fascination with witnessing how history was being created, and his recognition of the existence of Fate, an unpredictable force which lay beyond the reach of human reason and intuition.

For a true symbolist the external, physical phenomena of life were only symptoms of hidden spiritual realities. First of all, an echo of the bitter feud that the symbolists had fought within the arts could be discerned in the World War. The battle line appeared once again to be drawn between spirituality and materialism. Mysticism and creative power were confronting rationalism and positivism. Belyi saw the war as the outcome of a crisis of consciousness. Matter in the shape of the machine had revolted against man. Merezhkovskii and Gippius agreed: the conflict was ultimately one between spirit and matter. The balance between spiritual and technical culture had been upset, with an aggressive nationalism and militarism as the result. Sologub and Briusov also talked with apprehension about the threat of the mechanization and automatization of the human soul.

The conflict could be seen as a shared European tragedy, the result of a conformist, smug, petty-bourgeois mentality and an erroneous world view. Seen from this angle, the war was merely a just, inevitable punishment, which contained in itself the possibility of renewal. This standpoint was most consistently held by Belyi, while Sologub, Bal'mont, Briusov, Ivanov, Gippius, and eventually also Merezhkovskii succumbed to the temptation of differentiating between the nations involved. The main conflict of the World War emerged for them as that between Germany and Russia. There was a symbolist scenario ready for a new Russo-Asian conflict, with fear of the "Yellow Peril" as its driving force, but it could only be applied to the present situation with considerable modification. A reverence for German culture, a major spiritual source for Russian symbolism, prevented writers like Belyi and Blok from vulgar verbal attacks upon the enemy, but it could also add a feeling of strong disappointment to the general shock of the war. There gradually emerged an image of modern Germany as the main representative of matter, materialism, positivism,

atheism, mechanical thinking, automatization, nationalism and militarism. In Germany, deification of the state principle, the organized national collective, and, in the final analysis, the concept of mangledness had won, and therefore Germany was the power which prevented history – and the symbolist vision – from reaching its apogee.

The question of nationalism versus universalism was of fundamental concern for Merezhkovskii. He saw the ultimate reason for war in the division of humankind into national collectives, while salvation lay in the overcoming of chauvinism – including the Russian version – and the recognition of universalism. The war was a triumph for nationalism, but it could also demonstrate its inherent weakness and thus bring about its elimination. The war would make the crisis of individualism perceptible and show the necessity for communion and collective forms of life. As Russia was closest to the realization of the ideal of Christian sociality, its concrete mission in the war was to rescue the true, eternal Germany from its present, false double and set an example of universality.

From the idea of a positive Russian role in the World War it was a short step to Russian Messianism. This found its expression in Ivanov's and Sologub's pan-Slavic dream of a spiritual and, eventually, political rapport between the Slavonic peoples,³ a process which would start through the birth of mutual understanding between the Russians and Poles. According to the neo-Slavophile view, supported especially by Ivanov, the war revealed the rift between the West and the East as embodied in Germany and Russia. The question of a specifically Russian, or, more broadly, Slavonic identity, a common spiritual outlook, acquired an immediate significance in this connection. In the war the shortcomings of the Russian character – among them a fatal weakness for and dependence upon German culture and thought – were brought to the surface to be destroyed, while its true essence and calling were ultimately defined and fortified. Russia emerged – even for the cautious Merezhkovskii – as the counterpoint to Germany: a representative of the spirit, spirituality and the living man. Seen through this prism, even material goals, like the conquest of Constantinople, could be accepted if they enhanced Russia's grandeur as a spiritual leader.

According to Ivanov, Gippius and Merezhkovskii the claim to Russian exclusiveness was based upon a national sense of a qualitatively new form of

3 In 1905 Ivanov wrote to Briusov: "Let the world see (this is my fundamental belief) a state unity of the Slavonic popular rule." (Quoted in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: Valerii Briusov*, vol. 85, p. 487.)

organic collectivism, a universal Christian sociality. The terms could vary, but Gippius' "*vselenskost*", Merezhkovskii's "*vsemirnost*" and Ivanov's "*sobomost*" were all connected with eschatological expectations. A voluntary Christian unification, based upon love and a harmonious blend of individuality and collective feeling, was also something that Belyi had dreamed of, even if an inner split long prevented him from expressing it during the war years. It also – paradoxically – informed Bal'mont's craving for the right to ultimate self-fulfilment on both an individual and a national level, as against the German programme of standardization and the elimination of distinctions in the name of faceless state power. In the World War Russian Messianism mingled with apocalyptic Christianity, as the Second Coming, the birth of the Kingdom of God on earth and Godmanhood, was expected to occur.

The course of the World War mercilessly exposed the gulf between such ideals and reality. The crisis of the summer of 1915 showed all the expectations and predictions of the Russian symbolists to have shaky foundations. Ivanov remained unconcerned by this change of fortune, attaching importance only to metaphysical Russian reality. Briusov and Bal'mont, on the contrary, openly confessed their disappointment. Briusov was ready to question the whole war, as the goals set up by Russia appeared impossible to achieve. Bal'mont preferred to turn his back on a war that had proved to be unpredictable and instead to concentrate on poetry. Among the other symbolists one finds a growing awareness of Russia's deplorable political and social situation and a resulting feeling of responsibility. The country's prevailing backwardness could clearly not be seen as a sign of election, but as a feature to be eliminated. The war was a purgatory that would not only strengthen Russia's true national characteristics, but would also hasten its essential material development.

The military setbacks were also given a religious interpretation, as they were seen, most consistently by Sologub, who extolled the blessing of suffering, as a reenactment of the Golgotha drama. Belyi had talked about war as an individual crucifixion. Now Russia, betrayed and crucified, like Belgium and Poland, was repeating the drama of Christ, offering itself as a sin-offering. A development of the thought was expressed by Merezhkovskii: only when all of humankind had been crucified – as was the case in the World War – would a universal resurrection be possible.⁴

After the 1905 revolution there was a gap in Russia between the authorities and writers that not even the wave of patriotism during the World War could bridge. Denial of human authorities and a yearning for universal cata-

4 Merezhkovskii, *Nevoennnyi dnevnik*, p. 61 ("Raspiaty narod").

clysms had further strengthened the revolutionary mentality of the symbolists. During the World War, Merezhkovskii and Gippius repeatedly expressed their pain at the thought of the conflict between tsarism and “genuine Russia”. The military failures confirmed Gippius’ belief that a political revolution was also needed from the pragmatic point of view, as otherwise the war could obviously not be brought to a victorious conclusion. Fears of chaos made her prefer a palace coup to a spontaneous popular uprising.

The symbolists welcomed the fall of autocracy in February 1917. Again, as in 1914, there arose an inspiring sense of community with the masses, giving the impression that the relationship between the intelligentsia and the people, an issue which had especially troubled Blok, could be solved on a new basis. Just as had been the case with the World War, universal importance was assigned to the Russian revolution. Without ignoring the importance of political freedom, the symbolists looked to the religious meaning of events, connected with the realization of the ideal of all-humanity and Godmanhood. The revolution of the spirit that had failed to occur in the war was to be promoted by the February revolution.

The February revolution did not change Briusov’s, Sologub’s, Bal’mont’s, Gippius’, Merezhkovskii’s and Ivanov’s support of the war. War was now also to be waged in defence of the freedom and democracy that the revolution had brought with it. This was the “defensist” line. Furthermore, the sense of Russia’s obligations towards its allies emerged more urgently than previously. Free Russia should defend the freedom of other nations and peoples. Briusov had also reconsidered Russia’s war aims, now stressing their idealistic dimension.

It was at this point that the symbolists’ fragile, unspoken unity on the war issue split. Up to the February revolution, none of them had opposed the war, no matter whether they conceived of it as a feast or a tragedy. Only in 1917 did Belyi and Blok start consciously, but not publicly, to demand its conclusion, as it had lost its metaphysical dimension and turned into a “lie” and an endless shedding of blood. The course of events also fostered a more critical attitude towards the World War. It had been generally thought that a democratic Russia could wage war more successfully, but the collapse of discipline and the ensuing wave of desertions led to new military debacles. The German threat became more obvious. In the majority of the symbolists there arose a strong wave of patriotism and a conviction that the war had to be fought to the very end, as Russia’s entire existence appeared to be under threat. Merezhkovskii had originally wished that revolution would destroy statehood, but when this dream threatened to materialize in Russia alone, the nationalist awoke in him, too. Through their friendship with Aleksandr Kerenskii, Merezhkovskii and Gippius were close to the centre of political power, but just like Bal’mont, So-

logub and Briusov, by the end of the summer of 1917 they began to look for salvation from other directions, disappointed with the weak Provisional Government. Ivanov forms an exception, as even in this situation he defended the notion of Russia as a chosen nation and therefore relied on heavenly assistance, a miracle.

Initially Blok and Belyi had feared the signs of breakdown in the wake of the revolution, but gradually they came to accept the chaos as a necessity out of which something bigger would be born. Blok clearly differentiated between two kinds of "*odichanie*", one which led to a total moral dissolution, and another which possessed an apocalyptic, Scythian quality that would create a new history. He did not attempt to interpret events rationally, but tried instead to sense their essence. At a moment when the other symbolists voiced their disappointment in the Russian people in bitter verses, Blok intuitively trusted in its collective wisdom, seeing it as the main force of the historical moment.

By October 1917, hardly anything remained of the eschatological feeling and the grand visions of 1914. The majority of the symbolists only asked for measures which would save Russia from total dissolution. Belyi and Blok, however, pursued their own agenda. They had only with difficulty been able to see a connection between the World War and symbolist thought, but now they felt ready to apply the notion of transfiguration, already abandoned by the other symbolists, to the October revolution. Blok, Belyi and soon also Briusov greeted the new revolution as the true gate to utopia. Behind the political takeover, there lingered possibilities of a transformation of human consciousness and the transfiguration of humankind. The Bolsheviks' declared will to peace, which the other symbolists saw as a betrayal of Russia and its historic mission, won their approval. For Belyi the World War was the crucifixion of man and the October revolution was a resurrection. Russia's messianic role in this connection was emphasized. The same symbolic language could be used quite differently. Ivanov saw the October revolution as the death of Russia and the inescapable future defeat of the Bolsheviks as the day of resurrection. For Ivanov, Merezhkovskii, Gippius, Bal'mont and Sologub the new regime symbolized the victory of the destructive forces of Russian history and, on a spiritual plane, the coming of the Antichrist. Experience was indeed soon to prove that the October revolution was as incapable as the World War and the February revolution of supporting deeper spiritual changes. Another depressing defeat was added to the list of symbolist disappointments.

The main questions of the period 1914-1918 were inevitably not artistic, but social and political. Yet the war and the revolutions also presented an aesthetic problem for the symbolists. Could and should events be commented upon in fictional form, or would this mean a betrayal of symbolist aesthetics? The war

powerfully posed the choice between art and civic duty, as the poets were offered the possibility to participate in the spiritual mobilization and become a voice of the nation.

Of the eight main symbolists, Sologub emerged as a patriotic writer, who consciously used fiction as a weapon in the struggle. Faithful to his literary credo, he did not attempt to reproduce reality as such, but strove to create myths that would eventually become real both through their artistic power and the inevitable historical process. This was the democratic symbolism that Sologub had outlined on the eve of the war. He had not turned into a realist of the surface, but was still the demiurge that held the fate of the world in his hands. Sologub intentionally made his writing more accessible to a larger audience, abandoning his decadent outsider position. Sologub's journalism reveals that he saw more than the short stories and the poems tell, but as the depressing side of wartime life did not correspond with his image of the Russian future, it was excluded from his fiction.

For Merezhkovskii and Gippius, it was the very nature of fiction that formed the core of the problem of literature and war. Fiction was secondary to reality; being merely representative, it could not do justice to the historical events, far less add anything to what was generally felt and thought. Modern war with its ugly face was as such not suitable to be depicted. To render the suffering of war in fictional form was an insult to those who genuinely suffered. A voluntary silence was therefore the most decent attitude for a writer towards the theme of war. The alternatives were lyrical poems, reflecting the inevitable inner dilemmas of the persona facing a war, or non-fictional genres, like newspaper articles or diaries. There is a split between the private and the public face in Gippius, and one can also find many contradictory statements in her writings, but this was all in the spirit of her view of the artist as helplessly torn between different impulses during a national crisis.

It was mainly Briusov's unfailing reverence for art which revealed his place in symbolism. In the spirit of the earliest stage of Russian symbolism, he stressed the antagonism between art and the concerns of the present moment. He repeatedly decided to return from the topical to the eternal, from political questions to the sphere of culture, from journalism to poetry. Admitting the failure of symbolist aesthetics in connection with war, he recommended realistic poems with war scenes and front-line moods, rather than the application of a cosmic view of events. He himself climbed highest with his allegorical poems, a subgenre also favoured by Gippius and Bal'mont.

Briusov's dilemma was also felt by Bal'mont. In spite of a pronounced pro-war stance he only sparingly commented on contemporary events in his poetry. Defining the goal of poetry as Beauty and the self-affirmation of the poet,

the reality of war clearly lay outside his concept of art. The balance was only shattered in 1917, when the two revolutions gave birth to expressive political poetry. In this hour of destiny for Russia not only Bal'mont, but also, unexpectedly, Ivanov aspired to become a poet of national importance. Ivanov had seen the expression of the Russian "idea", the search for a national spirit, as the main duty of the poet. This he did with the help of visionary symbolist poems, in which the populist striving had no influence upon his sophisticated poetic language.

Blok and Belyi had never been able to write occasional verse with simplified, instant comments on and interpretations of the current moment. Peculiar to them was the intertwining of the personal and universal planes, a conflict which caused difficulty when the war and the revolutions were used as material for poetry. Belyi experienced the danger of being plunged into silence by events. Their sparse comments on events were intense subjective visions. This was symbolism with the two distinct layers and an attempt to go beneath the surface.

No matter how the question of whether the task of the poets was to interpret the war for the people or to express their own subjective feelings is answered, it cannot be claimed that the war and the revolutions gave birth to great literature among the symbolists. This was something they themselves were aware of. To write genuine "war poetry", that is front-line poetry, turned out to be a too demanding task, as it required them to go beyond their own limits and depict outward realities. Another major problem was their inability to renew the metaphorical side of their poetry. As a result, most of the symbolists were losing faith in the power of the word by 1917.

The symbolists had claimed to be initiates with a special feeling for the future. By underlining the religious aspect of humankind's tragedies, the symbolists had managed to see in them promises of a new future, but now man appeared to have distanced himself from the apocalyptic morrow, when the impossible would become reality. In most respects, it is difficult to recognize the First World War, as it is remembered today, in the writings of the Russian symbolists.⁵ Partly this was because of their biographical aloofness from the

5 It is indicative that the symbolist camp is not acknowledged to be an influential participant in the World War I discourse in Karen Petrone's *The Great War in Russian Memory* (2011). Petrone outlines the birth and development of the Soviet image of World War I, from the war years up to the fall of the Soviet Union. Even though contemporary mythic and heroic aspects of the war formed the basis of the Soviet World War I perception, the Russian symbolist experience was, not surprisingly, erased from the collective Russian memory of the Great War.

historical events, but it was also indicative of their fatal lack of perceptiveness about one of humankind's crucial modern experiences. They had sensed the war's and the revolution's looming approach on a general level, but none of them grasped the true essence of these events. The initiate's supposed knowledge of the future was revealed as false. The advent of a new order materialized in a way which symbolist thinking could not apprehend. Eventually the expected transfiguration came most of all to concern the symbolists themselves.

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Index of Names

- Akhmatova, Anna 27n, 61, 250
 Albert, King of Belgium 64
 Andreev, Leonid 23, 67n, 82, 83, 86, 149, 150,
 154, 179, 248, 302, 310
 Aseev, Nikolai 51
- Bal'mont, Konstantin 3, 5–6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13,
 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, 37, 51,
 62, 73–75, 78–81, 84, 85, 117, 121, 136–142,
 150, 166, 187, 199, 200–201, 203,
 222–225, 229, 256, 259, 260, 263–265,
 268, 269, 283–285, 292–293, 298, 299,
 302, 303–307, 308, 313–314, 318, 327,
 331, 333, 335–336, 337, 339, 341, 342,
 343, 344–345
 Baltrushaitis, Iurgis 6, 39, 78, 318
 Bedford, Harold 164n, 165n, 231n
 van Beethoven, Ludwig 183
 Beketova, Mariia 250
 Beliaev, Mikhail 251n
 Beliaev, S.T. 251n
 Belinskii, Vissarion 4, 168
 Belmont, Leo 71
 Belyi, Andrei 3, 8, 9, 11, 13, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26,
 27, 28, 29, 30, 39, 40, 86, 104, 117, 121,
 166, 168, 177, 179, 182–190, 191, 206,
 237–247, 250, 259, 262–263, 270,
 287–289, 311, 318, 319, 325–332, 337, 338,
 339, 341, 342, 343, 345
 Berdiaev, Nikolai 89, 90, 271n, 276, 287n, 316
 Blok, Aleksandr 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 20, 21,
 22, 24, 26, 27–28, 30, 38, 40, 61, 65, 67,
 72, 73, 86, 93, 104, 117, 150, 166, 173–182,
 184, 191, 194, 206, 237, 239, 244,
 247–253, 258, 259, 270–271, 287,
 289–291, 294, 296, 309–312, 318,
 319–323, 324–325, 327, 329, 331, 336,
 337, 338, 339, 342, 343, 345
 Blok, Liubov' 174
 Bobrov, Sergei 51, 62
 Bol'shakov, Konstantin 51, 62
 Briusov, Valerii 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12,
 13–15, 17, 18–19, 21, 23, 24, 26, 32–37,
 40–50, 51–59, 64–65, 67, 70–73, 86, 94,
 106–115, 117–120, 140, 150, 166, 173, 176,
 187, 194, 195, 199–200, 202–204,
 219–222, 249, 253–257, 258, 259, 260,
 269, 270, 276, 277–282, 288, 318, 320,
 323, 332–334, 337, 338–339, 340n, 341,
 343–344
 Bukchin, Semen 48n
 Bulgakov, Sergei 276
 Bunin, Ivan 78, 82, 276, 333
 Bushuev, Viacheslav 204
- Chaadaev, Petr 168
 Chebotarevskaiia, Anastasiia 6, 192
 Chirikov, Evgenii 75
 Chkhaidze, Nikolai 275, 291
 Chulkov, Georgii 10, 24, 183, 315
- D'Annunzio, Gabriele 133
 Derbenev, G. 48n, 70
 Dolgoplov, Leonid 176, 321
 Dostoevskii, Fedor 9, 89, 92, 94, 116, 120, 146,
 160, 162, 167, 207, 208, 233, 239, 247, 315,
 328
- Elsworth, John 189
 Ermilov, Vladimir 2
 Ern, Vladimir 99
 Esenin, Sergei 50
- Fedorov, Aleksandr 47, 54
 Filosofov, Dmitrii 153, 158, 297, 298
- Gertsen, Aleksandr 221
 Gippius, Zinaida 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 17, 19,
 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 39, 63, 68,
 75–76, 82, 84, 85, 86, 87, 109, 117,
 143–159, 160, 162, 166, 169, 170, 173, 176,
 178, 179, 181, 198, 226–231, 235, 236, 237,
 245, 246, 247, 258, 259, 262, 263,
 266–267, 269, 272–274, 275, 281, 287,
 288, 293–298, 299, 302–303, 312–313,
 317, 318, 319, 321, 322, 323, 324, 332, 333,
 335, 337, 338, 339, 340–341, 342, 343,
 344
 von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang 90, 99, 126,
 137, 164, 169, 183, 185, 210, 237, 247

- Gorodetskii, Sergei 72, 115n, 116, 176
 Gor'kii, Maksim 23, 48n, 82, 83, 84, 86, 159, 168, 169, 202, 221, 230, 253, 272, 317, 322, 333
 Graham, Stephen 232, 233
 Grechaninov, Aleksandr 259, 260, 264n
 Grigor'ev, Apollon 290
 Gumilev, Nikolai 51, 250, 320
 Gurdov 112, 113
- Hauptmann, Gerhardt 131, 137
 Hegel, Friedrich 92, 427
 Heine, Heinrich 137
 Hoffmann, E.T.A. 137
- Iasinskii, Ieronim 333
 Ibsen, Henrik 190, 263, 328
 Ivanov, Anatolii 219, 229n
 Ivanov, Georgii 199
 Ivanov, Viacheslav 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 34, 38–39, 46, 51, 52, 62, 73, 76, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86–96, 98, 104, 105, 117, 120, 121, 146, 149, 150, 164, 166n, 167, 204–209, 221, 222, 230, 234, 259, 260, 261–262, 270, 285–287, 307–309, 314–317, 318, 320, 323, 325–329, 332, 335, 337, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 345
 Ivanov-Razumnik 244, 288, 311, 324, 330
- Kant, Immanuel 99, 126, 183, 206
 Kartashev, Anton 258n
 Kataev, Valentin 51
 Kerenskii, Aleksandr 150, 159, 258, 259, 266, 267, 268, 272, 276, 278, 279, 287, 288, 289, 291, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 301, 302, 307, 312, 319, 342
 Khlebnikov, Velimir 50
 Khodasevich, Vladislav 13, 253n
 Kornilov, Lavr 281, 282, 295, 298, 299, 302, 311
 Kriuchkov, Koz'ma 63
 Kuprin, Aleksandr 67
 Krasinski, Zygmunt 81
 Kropotkin, Petr 87, 265, 314
- Leitner, Andreas 216, 217
 Lelevich, G. 36n, 269
- Lenau, Nikolaus 137
 Lenin, Vladimir 19, 183, 256, 276, 287, 291, 310, 319, 324, 334
 Leskov, Nikolai 167
 Lunacharskii, Anatolii 318
- Makogonenko, D.G. 305
 Maiakovskii, Vladimir 50, 107, 219
 Makovskii, Sergei 180, 181
 Maksimov, Dmitrii 15, 108, 334
 Mandel'shtam, Osip 50, 61
 Matich, Olga 152n
 Merezhkovski, Dmitrii 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 29, 39, 65, 67–68, 73, 75, 76–78, 81, 82, 84, 87, 109, 117–118, 122, 146, 147, 150, 157, 158, 159–173, 179, 226, 230, 231–237, 247, 248, 258, 259, 265, 266, 273, 274–276, 278, 280, 282, 287, 288, 293, 294, 295, 296–297, 300, 305, 308, 310, 312, 313, 317, 319, 320, 322, 323, 327, 329, 332, 336, 337–338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344
 Miciński, Tadeusz 79, 80, 81
 Mickiewicz, Adam 77, 81, 163, 164
 Miliukov, Pavel 46, 72, 289, 331
 Minskii, Nikolai 1, 4, 5, 6, 17, 21, 262
 Mochul'skii, Konstantin 15, 189
 von Moltke, Helmuth 189
 Mommsen, Theodor 90, 91
 Mstislavskii, Sergei 288
- Napoleon 200
 Nekrasov, Nikolai 229
 Nesterov, Nikolai 63
 Nicholas II 72, 180, 312
 Nicholas Nikolaevich, Grand Duke 42, 69
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 4, 5, 90, 99, 137, 138, 164, 166, 206, 239, 263, 328
 Novalis 90
- Obatnin, Gennadii 204n
 Orlov, Vladimir 244, 249, 303n, 305n, 306
 Ostwald, Wilhelm 67, 91, 92
 Ozhigov, A. 182
- Panasiuk, Porfirii 112
 Pasternak, Boris 50
 Péguy, Charles 228

- Peter the Great 168, 248
 Peterson, Ronald 1
 Petrone, Karen 345n
 Piast, Vladimir 174, 289, 291
 Plato 98
 Plekhanov, Georgii 183, 268
 Potso (Pozzo), Aleksandr 243, 244
 Protopopov, Aleksandr 226
 Pushkin, Aleksandr 50, 56, 101, 102, 105, 116,
 128, 146, 167, 168, 305
 Pyman, Avril 1, 251n, 252
- Rabinowitz, Stanley 215
 Rasputin, Grigorii 35, 133, 226
 Remarque, E.M. 246n
 Rustaveli, Shota 224
- Savinkov, Boris 281, 294, 295, 302
 Schelling, Friedrich 247
 Schiller, Friedrich 126, 128, 131, 164, 183
 Schopenhauer, Arthur 4, 90
 Schubert, Franz 183
 Schumann, Robert 183
 Severianin, Igor' 50, 61, 329
 Shershenevich, Vadim 51, 62
 Skriabin, Aleksandr 308
 Słōński, Edward 71
 Słowacki, Juliusz 80, 81
 Smirnov, Aleksandr 16
 Sologub, Fedor 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19,
 21, 23–25, 26, 29–32, 34, 36, 59–62, 64,
 65, 68, 73, 75, 76, 78, 79, 82–83, 84, 86,
 90, 96–106, 109, 111, 114, 117, 118, 120,
 122–136, 141, 148, 149, 152, 153, 155, 170,
 172, 179, 182, 187, 191–197, 198, 199, 206,
 209–219, 248, 258, 259, 267–268, 282,
 290, 294, 299–302, 304, 305, 306, 310,
 311, 313, 316, 317, 320, 322, 323, 327, 330,
 331, 332, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341,
 342, 343, 344
- Solov'ev, Vladimir 8, 13, 22, 146, 168, 177, 206,
 235, 239, 242, 330
 Stammer, Heinrich 325n
 Steiner, Rudolf 11, 26, 185, 189, 190, 238, 241,
 242, 244, 246, 262n, 330
 Stirner, Maks 263
 Struve, Gleb 333
 Struve, Petr 310
 Sukhanov, Nikolai 185n
 Sumbatov-Iuzhin, Aleksandr 46, 224
- Tereshchenko, Mikhail 258, 259, 271n, 289,
 323
 Tikhonov, Nikolai 51
 Tiutchev, Fedor 15, 59, 70, 71, 73, 89, 116, 118,
 120, 121, 124, 162, 168, 320, 333
 Tolstoi, Aleksei N. 115, 276, 310
 Tolstoi, Lev N. 52, 133, 145, 147, 148, 168, 170,
 171, 231, 236, 239, 288, 328
 Tret'iakov, Sergei 51, 62
 Tsekhnovitser, Orest 1, 2, 16, 112n, 119, 192,
 204, 224, 227, 305
 Tsvetaeva, Marina 262n, 333
 Tumpovskaia, M. 59
 Turgenev, Ivan 52
- Veresaev, Vikentii 271n, 276
 Verhaeren, Emile 65, 256
 Volkov, A. 2
 Voloshin, Maksimilian 54, 184, 276
- Wagner, Richard 183, 239
 Wilde, Oscar 24
 Wilhelm II 96, 164, 273
 Wyspiański, Stanisław 81
- Zhukovskii, Vasilii 259
 Zlobin, Vladimir 28
 Zorgenfrei, Vil'gel'm 176, 251